

GREAT PAGES

A common-sense
approach to
effective desktop design

Jan V. White



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A common-sense
approach to
effective desktop design

Jan V. White

Selected and introduced by Tony Sutton,
Design Director, *The Globe and Mail*, Toronto



Serif Publishing, El Segundo, California

BY THE SAME AUTHOR:

Editing by Design
Designing for Magazines
Mastering Graphics
The Grid Book
Using Charts and Graphs
Graphic Idea Notebook
Graphic Design for the Electronic Age
Color for the Electronic Age

Lear Graphic Design (Video)

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Introduction

By Tony Sutton, Design Director,
The Globe and Mail, Toronto

MY initial contact with Jan White came soon after I wrote to the publisher *Folio*, an American media journal, seeking permission to reprint Jan's article, *Considerate Typography* (see page 61), in my magazine.

What followed was a surprise. Expecting, at best, a terse agreement or, at worst, a polite refusal, I was surprised to open my postbox and find a large envelope full of articles and a long letter from the author himself.

That first communication was the beginning of a professional relationship which has benefited myself and the readers of *Review*, who have acclaimed Jan's wealth of knowledge and his writing style, a combination that has made him the magazine's most popular contributor.

The secret of Jan's success is a dogged determination to meld the two rival groups in print communication—writers and designers—into a single team, in which each group acknowledges, appreciates, and respects the other's contribution to the business of publication-making.

As he points out, those communicators who are capable of bridging the gap between the rival camps are very rare indeed. Their insight—perhaps overview is a better word—makes them leaders in the profession. Jan V. White is such a person—a writer, designer, educator, and journalist philosopher.

This book is a selection of some of his most important essays and articles. I hope you get as much pleasure, and absorb as much knowledge, from reading it as I had in editing and putting it together.

Page makeup is commonly called
design.

It is therefore thought to be an art-form
intended to create
beauty.

It is nothing of the sort.

Design is a
lubricant for ideas.

Publishers don't know design? Nonsense!

IF you are a communicator (publisher, writer, idea-generator, information-spreader), your job is to transmit knowledge or information of some kind. And, like it or not, you are faced with having to do that transmitting by the most effective means available. Alas, verbally oriented people usually believe—mistakenly—that words are the only element they can confidently control or are qualified to judge. Anything else—such as “art”—is beyond them. Listen to what some say:

“I’m a writer, why should I know anything about art—that’s what I hire an artist for.”

“The artist is always pressuring me to leave white space and bullying me to do what I don’t want to do because it looks better. How do I know? . . .”

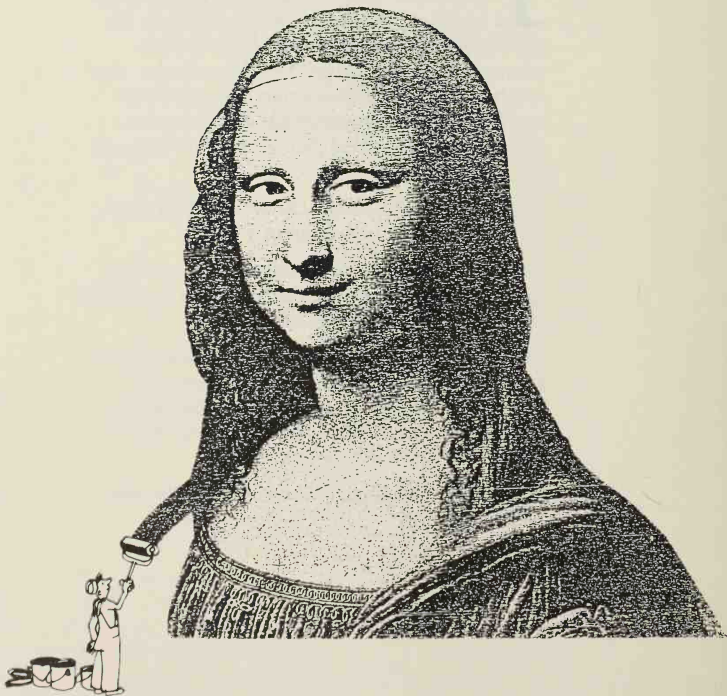
“All the designer cares about is pretty pictures and expensive color and we fight all the time. Is he supposed to control me, or do I come first? Who is the one to do the deciding, and if it is me, then on what basis do I make my decisions?”

“I don’t know a thing about art, but I know what I like.”

When a message is clearly defined—once you have determined what you want to say—then the means of saying it grows organically out of its very structure — out of its concept, meaning, and content.

But if you “dress the story up” with an extraneous coating of “art” or “design,” then the question of “looks” does indeed rear its terrifying head: suddenly you, the verbal communicator, are faced with a dragon—subjective artistic decision-making. You must begin to make judgments and give opinions on an aspect of the product that you are responsible for, but have lost control of.

Why have you lost control? Well, you haven’t exactly lost it—you’ve relinquished it to the artist, who you believe has received deeply secret revelations to which only she and other official artists are privy.



You, the verbal communicator, seem to have generated feelings of inferiority with yourself: puny word-person that you are, you think you aren't qualified to cogitate in artistic terms, much less make value judgments about art or design. Let's try to debunk this myth by analyzing what design really is, as well as what it is not. This should put the verbal person on a slightly stronger footing in his dealings with his traditional "enemy," the designer. And it should make him realize that cooperation and the melding of the two skills are not only possible, but useful—no, essential—to improve communication.

Balance the elements

To produce a magazine that communicates effectively, all the various elements that go into its makeup must be manipulated and balanced. What are some of the elements?

- The ideas themselves—the message.
- The flavor of the language in which the ideas are couched.
- Images through which the ideas can be transmitted.
- The scale of the elements, which becomes a clue to their relative importance.
- The sequencing of thoughts on the page, which should guide the reader logically through the presentation.
- The contrasts of size, scale, colorfulness, dullness, boldness, and so forth, that enliven the visual effect.
- The typefaces used, which affect the mood of the piece and the first impression.
- The very size, shape, and texture of the paper used, which elicits an immediate response from the reader.

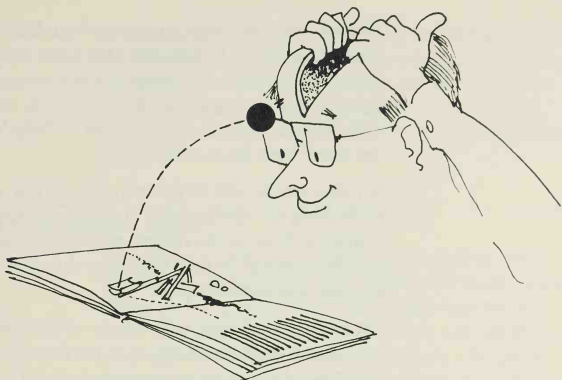
All these elements (and many others) need to be orchestrated into a visually unified and intellectually consistent whole. That process of orchestration is what graphic design in publications is all about. It doesn't have a thing to do with "art." Art, in this sense, is a misnomer. You do not have to be a trained artist to understand or to direct the creation, the styling, the assembling, or even the designing of a piece of printed communication.

One does not need the professional training of an artist because there are people with specialized skills and knowledge to do these things. But few word-people are also do-it-yourselfers pushing razor blades and rubber cement around—and it is not necessary that they become that: they can hire the service. What word-people do need is an understanding of the criteria on which "design" is based—and these criteria are eminently susceptible to verbalization and non-visual judgment. The reason is simple . . .

Design is an editorial tool

Or it ought to be. It should be a tool used to manipulate the raw materials: space, words-in-type, pictures, color, physical materials—all that is our stock-in-trade for communicating the ideas inherent in a story. The purpose of editorial design is not to make a handsome piece, but a piece that says something. Good design should make the reason for publishing the message catapult off the page at first glance. This should be the editor's primary goal.

Good looks (whatever that may be) are a by-product; good design is a functional technique—the means to an end. And that end? Clarity in communicating ideas—as they are defined by the writer. It follows, then, that editors or writers, even the least visually inclined ones, are qualified to judge whether their ideas are coming across crisply, concisely, clearly. In



this area, they can have supreme confidence in their judgment—because it is their very own domain. Obviously, the piece must also be attractive if it is to gain acceptance and get the reader to pay attention. But the fundamental requirement goes without saying: it is just as inescapably necessary as the requirement that the words in which the thoughts are couched be clearly and comprehensibly written.

What about aesthetics?

Good design is not an art form in itself. Nor is it a cosmetic applied to the surface or added later by an artist to concepts already cast in bronze by the writer. Good design is an integral part of the story itself. It makes the story's purpose visible at first glance. Laying out a page (or a booklet that fits into a #10 envelope, or a brochure, or a poster—or whatever the form the communication may take) doesn't just happen by inspiration. Nor is it a matter of subjective "liking" by anybody. The pattern that evolves must grow out of the needs, requirements, and limitations of the subject that is to be communicated, and from the physical characteristics of the materials to be used.

There is an inner logic in any such endeavor. It is the designer's job to discover that logic and, by so doing, lay bare the essentials of the message. Equally, it is the writer's job to know his own mind well enough to guide the designer, to help her find the inner logic he is seeking.

In other words, the writer must know the reason for publishing the story—what the material's significance will be to the reader, and how the reader can put the material to use. Knowing this, the writer can lead the designer to it.

But if the writer fails to be clear—if he doesn't have an opinion or remains fuzzy in his decision making, then one of two disastrous consequences will result: either the design will betray the lack of opinion by its visual dullness (it will be a say-nothing and therefore a look-nothing compromise), or the design will be misleading because the designer will have filled the vacuum with her own viewpoint—which will most likely be off the mark, superficial, ignorant, and prejudiced.

Neither consequence is the designer's fault, though! Without input from the one person she relies on to inform her, the designer can only fall back on her



own ideas. Such design cannot help, but be misleading because the designer will most probably emphasize the wrong elements. The design may well turn out to be very pretty (it may even win design awards!), but that prettiness won't have a thing to do with the subject.

Design that makes sense

To create sense-making design—design that communicates—the editor and designer, as a team, must define and articulate what they really want to say. Once they decide their purposes, they can invent a language that is both visual and verbal, a language that will transmit those purposes from the page to the reader's consciousness—quickly, clearly, effectively. When they know what they are saying, the designer and editor can organize the flow and argument; choose the appropriate words; invent illustrations to go with or even supplant some of the words; and then assemble the whole in a page arrangement that makes sense—that communicates.

What is important in the story can be allotted space (or size) appropriate to its importance, it can be placed to advantage—positioned where it will be most distinctively visible. Therefore, knowing what is important is the key to a logical layout: make what is important big, and put it near the top of the page. After filling the big spaces with the big things, you fit in the rest. It is just that simple.

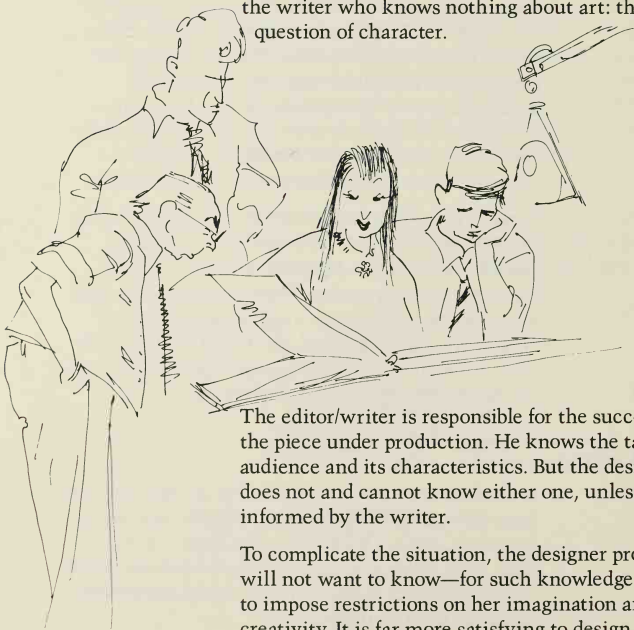
A good layout

A good layout is one whose whole is greater than the sum of its parts. If it just looks attractive and doesn't say much, doesn't reflect an inner meaning or purpose, then it is just a cosmetic sham—and the reader will see through it immediately (which means the producer loses credibility).

If, however, the layout tells its story and manages to look attractive while doing so, then you've got a winner—a synergetic wonder that makes one plus one equal three. And who is better qualified than the writer to make a judgment about the editorial effectiveness of a layout? Here, again, the word-person is on home ground and can have every confidence in his opinion.

“Yes, but what about typefaces, color, white space, balance, contrast, modern art, and whatnot?”

Here is another aspect of graphic design that needs to be taken into account, one that—no less than the others already discussed—is within the province of the writer who knows nothing about art: the vexing question of character.



The editor/writer is responsible for the success of the piece under production. He knows the target audience and its characteristics. But the designer does not and cannot know either one, unless she is informed by the writer.

To complicate the situation, the designer probably will not want to know—for such knowledge is likely to impose restrictions on her imagination and creativity. It is far more satisfying to design something according to one's own style and predilections than to accept limitations imposed from outside.

Some designers may even (perish the thought) look forward to the opportunity of making another nice piece for their portfolios out of a job at hand! It must be the editor's responsibility to insist on a format and graphic character that will be appealing to the specific audience he is approaching—the recipients he is intending to influence.

It is also that editor's prerogative to insist that the designer provide that desired character—or else!

But what if the editor does not know what may be right, and is afraid of deciding? Then the editor must ask the designer to do what her instincts



suggest. The designer's experience may well be a more dependable source of ideas than any other. And if she is a trusted member of the team in good standing, on an intellectual level with the word-people, her judgment may very well be precisely what is needed.

However, what happens if the designer comes up with something that is obviously wrong, and the editor knows it, but cannot find the lingo to critique it without hurting the designer's feelings and/or pushing her in the right direction?

Show and tell

The answer is comparatively easy: remember that the designer is visually oriented. So show her. The editor can gather samples of work that has the character he seeks—not necessarily on the same subject, but showing the right mood, the right graphic feeling. Such a showing can crystallize a vague conversation into a single-glance understanding. Nothing is as effective to visually oriented people as visual instructions or visual information.

Problems require solutions. And what I have presented is an eminently practical and feasible approach to a common problem. All it requires of the verbal people is that they make up their minds.

Making pages that appeal

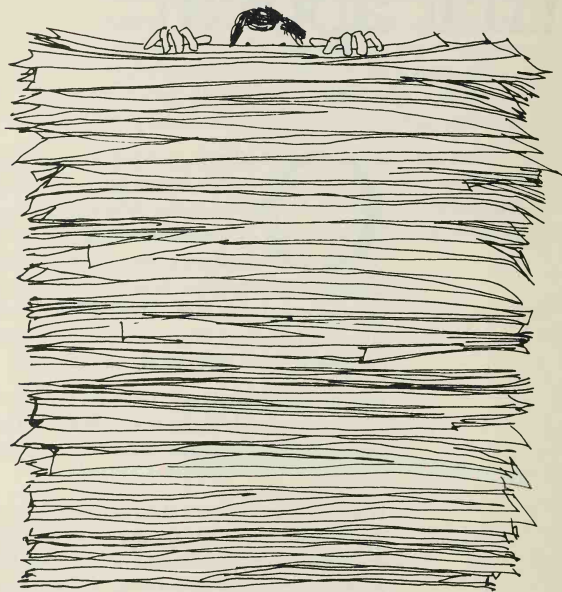
ONE of the myths in the field of publication making is that readers are readers. In actuality, they start out as viewers. They scan, they hunt and peck, searching for the valuable nuggets of information. Reluctant to work, saturated by media, and a bit lazy, they literally need to be lured into reading. Then, they need to be gently but purposefully led through the information.

Find the highlights that you know will fascinate your readers, and display them. Break out important quotes; make your pages irresistible, not just easy to get into.

Where do people begin reading? Where do you begin? Watch yourself, because you are typical. You don't always start at the beginning. Like you, most people enter where something catches their interest:

- An illustration
- A caption
- A picture
- A word
- A phrase
- A concept
- Even a headline.

The basic principle is simple: you aren't designing for beauty, but for utility. You are performing a service to the audience. People want their information fast and clear, so you'll generate enthusiasm if you make your product easy to get into.



Here are ten ways to intrigue and attract your readers:

1. List interesting information on the front cover. Arouse the viewers' curiosity. Give them good reasons to pick up your product and look inside at the table of contents.
2. Make the table of contents more than a mere tabulation: make it look inviting and exciting. Promise payoffs.

3. Let the table of contents' own organization reflect the way the entire publication is structured. Organize the elements in areas on the page so the viewer can follow them easily.
4. Lead the viewers' eyes around the page to the text. The biggest picture is usually the first element to be noticed. Pull them from there to the smaller picture, the headline, the deck, the caption, the text, by deliberate arrangement married to the flow of meaning. Start at the top left, work down toward lower right.
5. Break out the information that can be separated from the main body and box it. Identify and display it with its own heading. This gives the viewer twice as many reasons to start, besides making the text appear less daunting.
6. Use pictures to pull viewers into the information. They can be emotional magnets.
7. Use picture captions. The caption builds on the picture's capacity to arouse curiosity.
8. Translate as much of your statistical data as possible into charts and graphs. Don't repeat the information in the text.
9. Provide user-friendly services such as indexes, listings, coming attractions, etc. Locate them where they will be visible and of greatest service.
10. Use ample white space on the page. It is not wasted if it is used wisely and exposes the valuable material printed on the page. It can be used for contrast as well as for framing.

Here are nine ways to edit for the reader:

1. Don't make headlines too short. You must sell the significance of the story to the reader with as many words as are needed to do it vividly. Make sure they

understand the "What's in it for me?" aspect of the message.

2. Don't depend on a single title to sell your story. Have several interconnected steps of display type to lead the viewer/reader into the story.

3. The more headlines there are, the more chances there are of catching the reader. Build as many hooks into the publication as you can.

4. Put the best and most interesting information up front where people can find it. It will arouse their curiosity. Do not hide it in the middle of the text.

5. Break big, daunting-looking blocks of text into smaller bite-size chunks, each with its own heading.

6. Assemble short bits of information into a group so that the whole looks greater than the sum of its parts.

7. Support quotes with strong portraits of the people from whom the quotes are taken.

8. Support events in the text with action layouts that express the central theme of the story.

9. Support conclusions in the text with visual forms of information whenever possible.



Here are eight ways to design for the viewer:

1. Let the topic titles pop out by contrasting size, blackness, color, or unexpected handling, so the skimmer cannot help becoming aware of them and becoming oriented.

2. Arrange pages in areas with one information unit per area instead of stringing them out end to end.

3. Define areas of the page by means of ruled lines or by screened areas.

4. Use very pale screens to distinguish areas on the page; 20% is usually as dark as it should be.

5. Use broader bands of white space to separate the elements that need to be separated and narrower bands to tie elements together. See space as “moats” separating stories.

6. Give viewers typographic clues to help find and interpret the information. Big and bold is interpreted as important, small and pale is understood to be less significant.

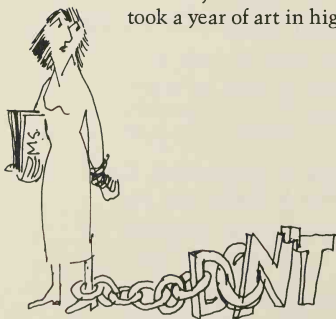
7. Indentation is a universally understood system of ranking. Use it to identify sets and subsets. Combine indentation with type size to show a clear hierarchy.

8. Aligning elements gives a sense of order. It helps orient the viewer. Repeat alignment on successive pages to help the viewer through the material.



Publication design and common sense

THOSE word-oriented writer/editor-types are often daunted by "Design". When they started in the writing business—whether informally or via journalism school—it never occurred to anybody to tell them that their words would have to be turned into visible marks on paper if their ideas were to be transmitted to someone else. And once you have those visible marks, you cannot help but have design. That's why design and layout are integral to journalism. Their potential must be understood by every communicator, so they can be skillfully utilized. But that's scary, because "I only took a year of art in high school . . ." "I haven't been



trained for it . . ." "I don't know a thing about Van Gogh . . ." * "I . . ." (fill in your own cop-out).

What nonsense. If you can think logically, get from point A to point B, follow from cause to effect, decide on the importance of one element in contrast to another, then you can Do Design. It is nothing more than a logical extension of editorial thinking, merely giving visible form to verbal decisions. Yes, but that is precisely the kind of arcane esoterica that scares the hell out of you, right? Hold on.

You already know the fundamentals

1. We read from left to right.
2. We start at the top and work down the page.
3. Pages in a publication are related to each other.
4. Closeness continues; distance separates.

Are these statements so disturbing? They are so profound that they are obvious—yet they are the foundation for the success of much visual presentation (i.e. "layout"). The point is that "design" in our printed-page profession has nothing to do with Art in the abstract. It has everything to do with the functional exploitation of the way our viewer/readers perceive and interpret what we, writers, editors, and designers, present them on our pages. What we mean by "art" is actually the visual component of editing.

Alas, Makeup Day is usually added to our private roster of inevitable pains in the neck, joining death, taxes, and the fact that everything nice is fattening.

**Which has nothing whatever to do with the sort of "art" done for printed communications, but everybody thinks it does. Isn't that ridiculous! Unfortunately we have to use the same vocabulary ("art," "design," "good taste," "looking pleasing") but the context changes the meaning and implications. Forget the Fine Arts, and concentrate on the functional end of things, which is anything but "Fine."*

That's because on that Dread Day we forget our professional common sense and force ourselves to enter that strange aesthetic visual Art-world of which we publication-makers mistakenly think we're supposed to be a part. No wonder it's scary and uncomfortable.

Instead, let's get back to the fundamentals: we know how our readers react—they react just as we do, because we are readers ourselves! So let's work with the insights we can be sure of. (Like reading from left to right, starting at the top, and having things that belong together, close together.) They can help us do a job that works better. Interestingly enough, what works better often also manages to look better just by virtue of the fact that it works better. A natural "rightness" is so much more valuable than a phony look that has to be cosmetically added! So relax and take courage in the realization that subjective aesthetic judgments are not required. What is required is objective editorial (journalistic) judgment based on fundamentals.

Fundamental 1: Left-to-right

That's a relationship that implies motion. Motion, in turn, implies sequence in time, because you have to have a beginning before you can have its consequence . . . an ending. Number three has to follow number two, which follows number one. When we verbalize this out loud, the sequence takes **t i m e** to pronounce, because the noises have to come out one after the other. When the words are transformed into printed symbols on the page, time turns into **s p a c e** because each symbol of the sequence (whether it be words in print or ideas in images) is presented as a discrete unit in the proper sequence.

The process of communication is understood the same way by the recipient of the message, whether it be spoken and listened to or written and read: the

sequence is interpreted as a sequence because of its sequential presentation in time or its translation into space on the page. Since we have been taught to read from left to right, we automatically assume that the beginning is at the left, and the end is at the right.

Useful principle: If we start at the left and end at the right, the reader will follow our thinking most easily.

Fundamental 2: Top-to-bottom

This is so embarrassingly obvious that it ought not to deserve this valuable space. Yet its implications certainly do. The tops of pages are the important areas, because that's where we automatically start scanning for "interesting stuff" when a new page is revealed. That's where we put our best material. That's where the eye-catching pictures go. That's where headlines go. In newspaper tradition the big ones go at the top; they get smaller as you go down the page—fine for a large newspaper sheet, unnecessary in 8½x11. The top of the page is where we build our product's strength (by rhythmic repetition of signals, so they accumulate in the viewer's subconscious into an overall impression of usefulness and value).

By the same token, the bottoms of pages are much less important. Who ever looks down there except as an afterthought?

Useful principle: Put your good stuff where it'll do you the most good—in the area where readers can't help noticing it.

Fundamental 3: Page-by-page

No pages in our multi-page printed product exist in limbo. We may think of them as such and make

them up individually in the process of publication-making, but they are perceived as part of a package by the recipient. Pages are revealed in a sequence of related impressions, like a film strip. Our product is a continuum, folded like an accordion. That yields an interrelationship that allows us the great advantage of building a whole that can be greater than the sum of its parts. By seeing the broader terms, we can plan on a larger scale and build in rhythm, contrast, surprise—"pacing."

If that weren't enough, the interrelationship gives us the capacity for even broader impact by exploiting memory (of what the reader saw on the preceding pages) as well as curiosity (about what exciting material is to be found when the next page is turned). These are all factors evolving from the physical object we work with, and that magic tool, design, can help us benefit from them.

Useful principle: the readers see it in serial form . . . better make the most of that flow.

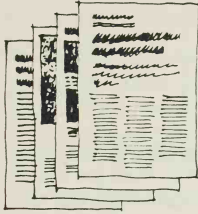
Fundamental 4: Closeness

That's a static relationship of placement affecting the spacing between two or more items. Two hunks of something on a page can be made to relate by proximity. Or they can be divorced by distance. The closer together, the more intimate the relationship is understood to be. Overlapping is about as close as you can get.

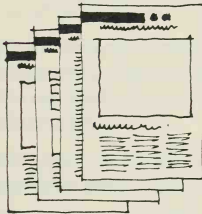
Useful principle: The spacing between items is the clue the viewer needs to understand the page arrangement.

A few examples of what these obvious principles imply follow.

Reading the page (top-to-bottom)



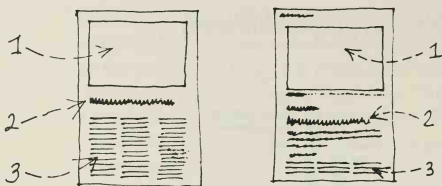
The top of the page is the area readers scan as they flip through the issue. That's where clever publication makers catch readers with the most interesting material.



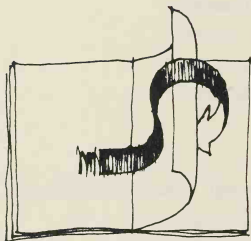
Repeating a characteristic visual image on the tops of all pages ties the issue together into a product with strong recognizable "presence."

Readers' curiosity is aroused by what they see in pictures. That's why it is good policy to put the picture at the top of the page (1). It lures them down into the copy beneath: that's where they are used to looking for explanatory captions.

The headline (2) should do double duty, making sense of the picture as well as signaling important information in the story. Text (3) comes below the headline.

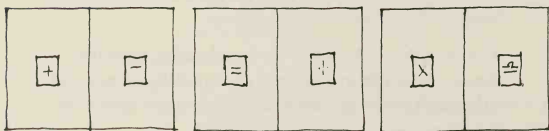


That's the classic sequence down the page. The sequence can be filled out with running head, tagline, caption (though that can often be dispensed with on story openers), deck over or under the head, byline, bio, and—what else? That ought to be enough! The fewer elements to complicate that simple Picture/Head/Text top-to-bottom relationship, the better.



Flow (left-to-right, page-by-page)

The relationship of one two-page spread to the next one is an essential advantage we should exploit whenever possible: it increases the perceived scale of our product.

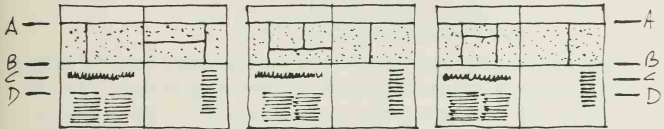


Repetition is the easiest way to make sure the reader recognizes the flow, or third dimension, of a

multi-page product. So long as the element being repeated is placed in the identical position and its shape is the same every time, details inside the element itself can be changed as needed.

No, repetition does not make for dullness. Repetition unites. Variety disintegrates (by definition—though it does, indeed, add variety). Is unity or variety of greater value in the given circumstances, in any specific context? There is no “right” way.

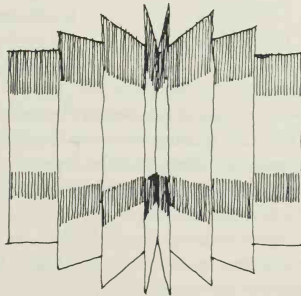
Alignment from page to page is probably more difficult to construct than plain repetition of a



single element, because it demands that the edges of elements be placed in the same position relative to the top and bottom of the page (A,B,C,D, in the illustration, above).

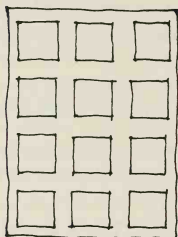
This may not always be possible, but it's great if a workable pattern can be invented.

The underlying rhythm of the pages becomes inescapable. That's the principle underlying the grid.

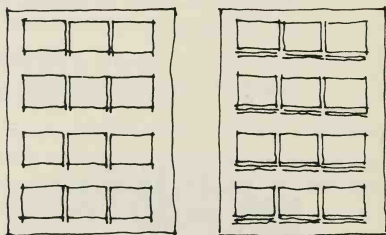


Picture sequences (left-to-right)

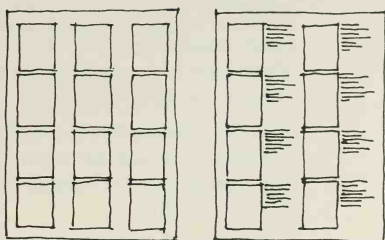
The reader shouldn't have to puzzle out the story line in a cartoonlike presentation:



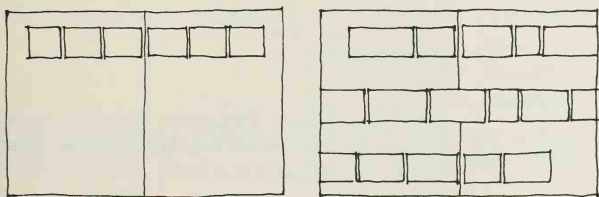
In the picture, above, does the story flow vertically or horizontally? Since there's equal space between the pictures, there is no clue. (Of course, captions and numbering might be used as crutches . . . but that's cheating. There's no excuse for needing crutches).



Narrow spacing between the side-by-side pictures and wide spacing between the bands (up and down) transform what could be a puzzle into an immediately obvious presentation. This is the easiest presentation to handle, because captions can easily be run under each picture, reinforcing the story line by close explanation of the images with appropriate wording.



Narrow spacing between pictures up-and-down and wide spacing between the vertical strips (side by side) fosters an interpretation of a filmstrip sequence. The problem for makeup is what to do with captions, because running them alongside is not as satisfactory as below each picture. Ideal compromise: flush left, ragged right, aligning the top of each picture with the first line of each caption.



Taking the principle of proximity in sequences to its logical extreme, it is perfectly safe to cross the gutter from one page to the next (even with imperfect binding and printing technology!) if the horizontal rows are clearly articulated. As long as the horizontal placement of the rows remains the dominant visual element, variety of picture sizing and bleeding of the rows at each end can lend visual interest and editorial emphasis to the presentation.

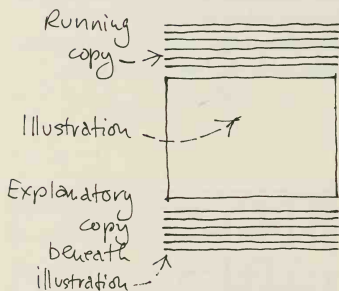
Text with illustrations (top-to-bottom, closeness)

Much publishing, especially in the technical documentation area, consists of presenting information in sequence. Ideas flow from cause to effect, in a series of related steps.

Where only text is concerned, the reader is unlikely to become confused. But when words are mixed with illustrations, the viewer's perception of the material is altered.

The first thing anyone looks at on a page is the picture because pictures are less "work" than words.

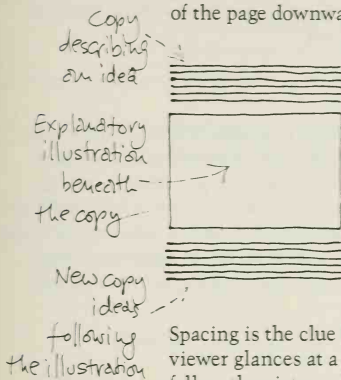
Pictures (diagrams, drawings, charts, anything nonvisual) arouse curiosity, and readers have been taught since childhood to search for explanations in



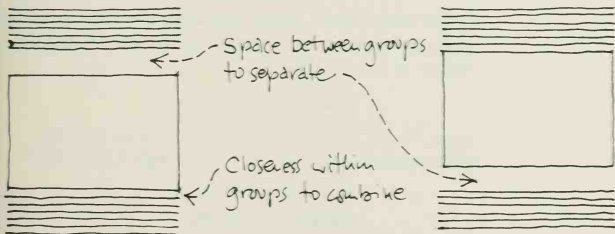
the caption beneath the picture. Therefore, the ideal place to put explanatory copy is right there, where the reader is going to look for it.

But pictures can sometimes be minor elements that merely explain something that is fully covered in the text, where the important thrust of the idea is supposed to lie. Under those conditions (admittedly rather special and most often found in instructional materials rather than in more normal direct reportage), placing the words beneath the picture

would be confusing. Clearly, the words need to precede the picture, because we read from the top of the page downward.



Spacing is the clue to avoiding confusion when a viewer glances at a page, whether explanations follow the pictures (by being placed beneath them) or precede them (by being placed above them). The spacing clues must be subliminal and obvious: closeness of related elements and separation of

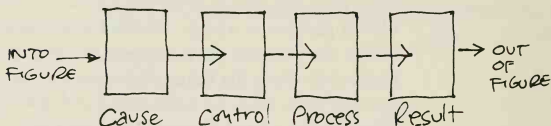


unrelated ones must be absolutely clear. You make tightness look tighter (where that is wanted) by making gaps wider (where they make sense). This runs directly counter to the usual editorial "logic" that stipulates a full line of space between items, no matter what . . . You want just half a line of space between the elements that are supposed to be tight,

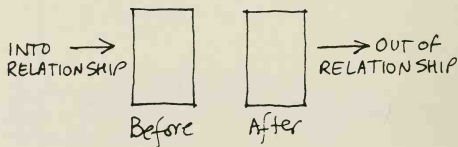
and 1½ lines of space between those that are meant to be separated. You still use the same total amount of space, but you capitalize on the space you have more intelligently:

Diagrams (left-to-right)

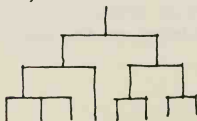
Illustrations—charts, graphs, technical drawings, building plans, etc., are scanned, read, and interpreted the same way as text: left to right, top to bottom. A drawing showing a flow is followed from start to finish as though it were a sentence in words, and the easiest way to make the sequence understandable is to have the drawing follow from left to right.



By the same token, before and after are most quickly understood when the "before" is on the left, and the "after" is to its right.



The exception is, of course, where hierarchical symbols (like organization diagrams) are used. They depict flow of responsibility from the top downward and need to be imposed on the page in the standard way.



After all, the purpose is fast, easy, clear communication.

Communication is a two-step process, requiring presentation from the givers (i.e., us, publication-makers) and interpretation from the receivers (i.e., our readers). We must learn to use our shared language, be it verbal or visual. And that's easy because that's where common sense comes in.

Words and pictures

THIS chapter is about a difficult subject. It is not about design as such, nor about editing as such, but rather about design and how it relates to editorial content. When text is discussed, you don't expect to see images, because the subject is words, theory, content. When the subject of design comes up, however, you expect to be "shown and told" with specific graphics.

That cannot be the case in this chapter. It is impossible to show you either good or bad examples of the text/design partnership because of the definition of the problem: no example of a spread or two can possibly show you the successful relationship of looks to meaning without long-winded explanations of the verbal segment of that relationship.

The visual part of a publication impresses easily and is easy to understand—that's the part that wins design awards! The other half, the verbal, is a slower process requiring hard work, concentration, and intellectual comprehension. So this chapter will have to be a text story. The illustrations are window dressing: they are exactly what this is not about, and don't be misled by them. There is a place for illustration (I hope it is apt and appropriate), and it can be amusing and fun to look at, but it is totally unnecessary to make the points I want to get across.



Why? Because this is about a crucial, underlying philosophy, one of those intellectual underpinnings of our editing profession that is seldom talked about.

It is taken for granted and ignored because it belongs in neither of the two specialized camps into which we are divided: it is neither verbal nor visual. Being multi-disciplinary, it has few proponents who can make it their cause. Those editors who care about the visual aspect of their profession, and who understand its utility to themselves as communicators, and who would bother to defend it, are rare. Equally rare are the designers who become as excited by the verbal content of their subject as by its visual form. The members of our profession who have the insight to cooperate with one another—to bridge the chasm that divides us—and who can therefore come up with reliably good results in a consistent way, are few.



The rest have to depend on luck, superb pictures, and the general low level of visual/verbal communication in which not much is expected by the producers or the consumers of our products. Yet, when a story or an issue radiates, stimulates, and sparkles with liveliness, you—and your reader—know it.

In some respects, what we are discussing is similar to the blending of words and images you see on TV news: the newscaster's reporting is heard against a coordinated background of changing images that support, echo, enrich, embellish, flesh out, explain, chart, pinpoint, enliven, illustrate, and prove the veracity and immediacy and value of the words.

When imaginatively handled, such a TV presentation is not merely compelling, it can be mesmerizing. Just such a result can be achieved in print.

When it is, one or several concepts introduced by the following questions will most probably apply:

1. Are the pictures expressive of the editorial direction that the editor has defined as the main thrust of the message?

Do the pictures add to the meaning and flow of the story? Are they integrated with the purpose of the story? At the very least, pictures must show what something or somebody looks like—but they ought to do much more than that. In a newspaper, the story, by and large, is verbal and the accompanying pictures merely prove the what, who, and where. The story can usually stand on its own with no visuals at all. But a magazine is a very different kind of product; such naive utilization of material does not make the most of the opportunities inherent in the medium. What we need is deeper, cleverer editing that brings out the significance of the material and is accompanied by a parallel,

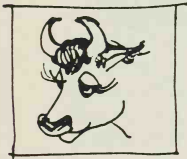
sophisticated exploitation of illustrations that raise the communication value of the product to its full potential.

2. Is the major image effectively married to the words by a common meaning and interpretation?

This is merely an extension of the principle in Question 1, brought down to a more detailed level. Specifically, does the main headline act as a caption to the opening illustration?

The picture is chosen to trigger a reaction in the viewer. That reaction initiates a trend of thought (curiosity?) that the headline should latch on to, sharpen, focus on, and direct to the aspect of the story the editor deems to be crucially significant to the reader.

Given this visual/verbal one-two punch, it is highly likely that the reader's interest will be so captured that the story will become irresistible. That way,



THIS NEW COW WILL BRING
FARMER JONES MORE INCOME

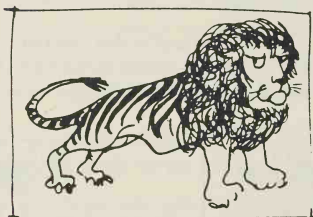


FARMER JONES BROADENS
HIS FIELD OF ACTIVITY

the first stage of salesmanship will have been accomplished: the front door will have been opened wide enough for you to get your foot in. On the other hand, if that headline does not relate to the picture, if it fails to follow from or grow out of it, and if it starts a conflicting trend of thought, then the attention-provoking capacity of the image will likely have been wasted.

3. Is a caption needed for every picture?

Perhaps that's putting the question too rigidly. The underlying reason for the question is more important. Every reader will contrive his or her own interpretation of any picture—even a simple mug shot—because pictures show so much. That is why it is essential to guide the reader's attention to that singular interpretation that corresponds to the story's substance. How? By the only method that works: words. Whether those words are written and put on the page in the form of a caption or some other arrangement really doesn't matter so long as the explanation can be readily found and is tied closely to the image in some way.



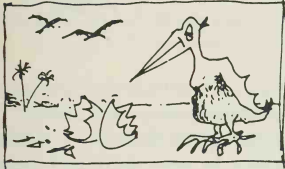
TIGLON *is a lion with stripes*

However, since we are used to finding the explanation underneath the picture, it is wisest to put it there, because that is where the reader is most likely to look for it.

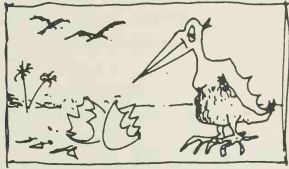
4. Are the captions handled so cleverly that the reader, whose curiosity has been aroused by the picture and who is therefore in a receptive mood for information, gets that information quickly?

Or are the captions just dry, factual labels? And if they start out with some sort of boldface lead-in, are such lead-ins written specifically as though they

were free-standing, self-contained little headlines? Usually they are not. Usually the boldfaced words just happen to be the first two or so words of a normal sentence, only set in bold "because that's our style." That policy is superficial, arbitrary and worthless. When you give an element some visual emphasis (such as boldfacing it), then it follows that such an element ought to be worthy of such emphasis.



Pterodactyl chick hatched somewhat prematurely, but he has nevertheless joined



Hatching somewhat prematurely, this pterodactyl chick has joined the test cr... etc.

If it is not, then all our precious emphasis-building techniques become cheapened. Furthermore, effective use of such "hot words" can arrest the readers' attention, leading them to the intended meaning of the image and thus result in their immediate understanding of it. Every caption ought also to contain a little more than just the description of what is in the picture, simply because every picture is an opportunity to reach readers more effectively. That is based on the fact that they are curious and interested before they are informed. It is folly to leave them hanging, wondering.

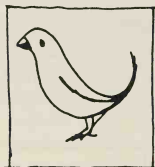
5. Are the pictures being used for their beguiling prettiness, or are they being used because they are the best of a rotten bunch and all you've got to work with?

That makes a difference.

a) If they are irresistibly lovely images, then you must, by all means, make the most of them—even if they are peripheral to the main direction of the

story. Finding beautiful pictures is hard enough as it is, and to reject them as irrelevant may well be folly.

Beautiful but
irrelevant



Ugly but
interesting



But to pretend that they are useful to the communication value of the story is cheating—and readers will discern that fast enough for the editor to suffer from it in lost credibility. So, what to do? Be honest and use the images for themselves, as objects to admire and enjoy.

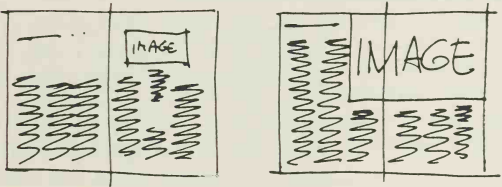
Quarantine them away from the story's main flow; label them as an added attraction; build them into the story where they will do the most good for the magazine as a whole rather than for the story in particular; put them in as a lead-in to set the mood; or attach them as a postscript tailpiece; or cross-reference them and run them opposite the inside back cover to capture those readers who read the book back to front.

b) If, on the other hand, they are the embarrassing best of a bad lot, and yet they are inescapably important in content, don't use them splashily. Instead, play them down small, at the foot of the page—even if you ought to use one as an opener.

Blowing up a crummy picture doesn't make it any better. All that does is bloat it and flaunt its inadequacy. Start the story some other way. How about a nice big headline?

6. Is the attention-getting potential of size used profitably?

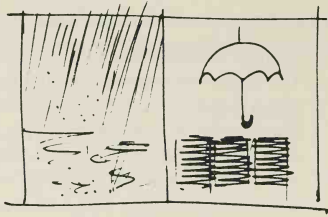
Readers interpret size as a measure of importance. The bigger something is on the page, the more important it is. (In newspapers, that is coupled with the perception that the higher up on the page something is placed, the more important it is likely to be.) This diagnosis may well be wrong, but that doesn't alter the fact that habits die hard. Therefore, it is wise to be aware of such a possible translation of our intentions—and use it for our own ends as a tool for fast and clear communication.



It is a helpful tool with which to create emphasis when text needs such emphasis. But if we misapply it, our credibility is reduced, and effective use elsewhere becomes less likely. So, are pictures run big because they are just pretty? Or because they can be enlarged to fill the empty space? Or because the importance of their content justifies their size?

7. Is each picture used to tell just one story?

Information is quickly and easily perceived that way. It is simple and uncomplicated to absorb, and, therefore, one picture telling one story is the most effective use of words and pictures in combination. If a single image is used as a springboard for more than one editorial point, confusion is likely to result. The one exception is the symbolic story



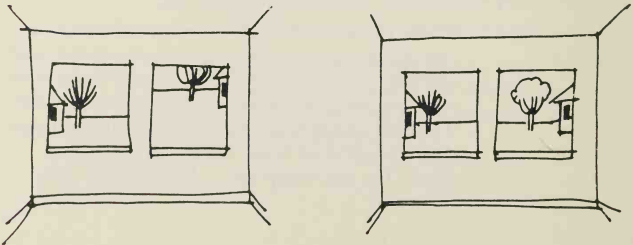
opener, of course—although even in that case the headline is, ideally, just one (umbrella) thought.

8. Is the illustration unexpected?

Obviousness tends to be dull. The easiest way to add spice to a story is to season it with images that are not anticipated. Perhaps they ought to be so unexpected as to border on the dangerous. Startling effects can be created by unlikely handling; unusual viewpoint; peculiar lighting; surprising juxtaposition; or surrealistic transposition of function, of scale, of relationship, and so forth—and all these factors are at the editor's disposal. All that's needed is the courage to use them.

9. Is there a logical visual relationship between pictures placed next to each other on the page?

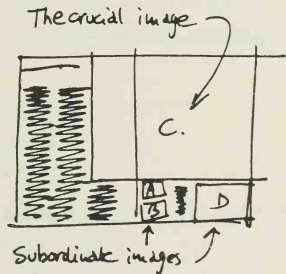
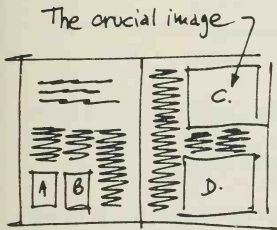
Imagine that the page is a paper wall and that the pictures are not pictures but windows cut through it. How logical—and how important—does it then become to align the horizon level in the scenes



outside so that they appear to continue from one window to the next? If the horizons have that logical relationship, then an enlarged impression is created that is far bigger than the one created by two little self-contained pictures. If the pictures fail to have that relationship, then an opportunity for grandeur and rich illusion has been lost.

10. Is there a dominant image carrying the main thrust of the story, and is its dominance reinforced by contrast with tiny supporting images?

Such forthrightness can only receive a good response because the story comes across clearly and easily. Why? Because we have simplified the work for the readers. They no longer need to figure it all out for themselves. They do not need to study the whole thing to draw their own conclusions. Instead, we have led them to the nub of the story by making it obvious—by making it visible—by making it BIG.

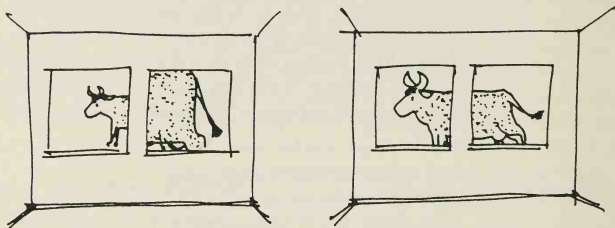


Then, with their interest aroused and channeled in the right direction with the appropriately matching words, it is highly likely that they'll follow up on that curiosity by glancing at, studying, and becoming fascinated by the supporting material. We have chosen to run the supporting material small

precisely to induce them to follow that sequence of thought. This is another gambit of salesmanship, though here we have progressed beyond the foot in the door of Question 2. Here we're giving our sales spiel to an already receptive audience.

11. Does a natural relationship of scale appear in neighboring images?

If the sizes of the pictures vary, then the scale of what they depict can also vary—and much value can be found in real contrast. (See Question 10.) But if, as so often happens, two adjacent pictures are the same size and shape, then a relationship in the



scales of what they depict becomes as useful as the alignment of horizons in pulling them together and making one plus one equal three.

12. Is bleed used constructively to expand the impact of the image?

By allowing the picture to flow beyond the confines of the page (at least in the viewer's imagination), the scope and the size of the publication is broadened, making it merely a focal microcosm of the wider world out there. Bombastic? Perhaps just a little, but a real illusion, nevertheless—if it is used right.

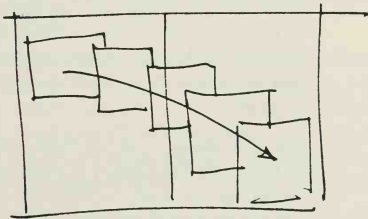
It doesn't work on a small scale. It has to be done with size and gusto. When the magazine spread is



held at the normal viewing distance (12 inches from the tip of the nose?) it blocks out practically everything but the outermost fringes of peripheral vision. It becomes a wide screen with the same potential a movie has to overwhelm (especially if you sit in the front rows). Little pictures bumping into the margin are, however, just that; little pictures bumping into the margin—usually doing so to create a bit of “variety.” Or maybe to make them a sliver bigger. But certainly not to make them particularly impressive, because they aren’t.

13. Are pages so cunningly laid out that the theme that runs through the pictures can be recognized at first glance?

A sequence can be made simple to follow (by alignment, overlapping, growth in size, numbering, and so on), or it can be left as a maze for readers to

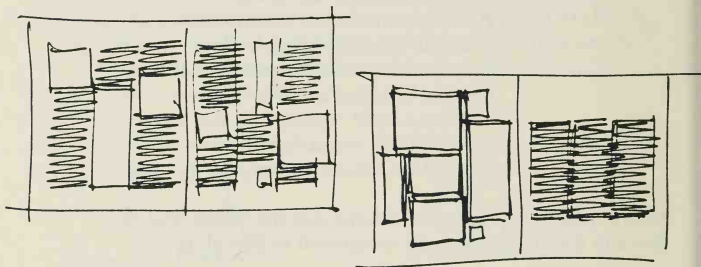


plod through for themselves. Sequences, of course, are the most obvious examples of themes flowing through a group of pictures. Less clear-cut (though no less valid) relationships ought to be made equally

evident in all stories that consist of more than just text with a couple of shots tossed in to break it up.

14. Do small, spotty pictures combined into larger groups make the whole greater than the sum of the parts?

Peppering the pages with insignificant odds and ends (usually to “break up the text”) is less impressive and much less attention-getting than pulling pictures together into overall groupings—as long as they make editorial sense together, of course.



How about contrasting the pictures against a unifying background of some sort? Or installing them inside a box or container? Or abutting them unusually close together? Or deploying them within an encompassing grid? Or fixing them in rhythmic patterns on the page, or giving them repetitive shapes so they act as visually connected links in a chain?

And how about cropping them and placing them so artfully that the subject matter itself flows from one image into the next, so that they are tied into an editorially logical unit by their inner meaning rather than by some visual geometry imposed on them from the outside?

15. Are the original pictures manipulated to bring out their latent story-telling capacity vividly?

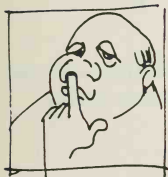
In other words, are the pictures turned into sharp tools of communication? In the context of editorial utilization of words and pictures, photographs are not sacred or final objects entrusted to us editors and designers to reproduce in their pristine state.

Photographers perceive them to be such, and rightly so from their point of view. And if the photographs are "good" (according to whatever definition may be appropriate in any given situation), tampering with them might well be the worst possible thing to do. No one is suggesting unnecessary, unjustified, or excessive lily-gilding or gimmickry. However, the editor's job is to publish information, not pictures. What matters is the story—the information inherent in that story. It is in the context of that story that the pictures must be judged. They are raw material, open to handling by sensitive designers working to help the editors express points of view.

In and of themselves, the pictures matter less than the story they embody. If the pictures can tell that story clearly just as they are, then so be it. That is marvelous. That is the way it should be. That is the ideal.

Alas, how many of our pictures fall short of such an ideal. They are the result of pointing a camera at a subject and telling the camera to record mechanically what it "sees." The communication capability of such pedestrian material might well be improved by some judiciously applied tinkering.

Okay, call it gimmickry, if you must. Go ahead and heap scorn upon it—but if the manipulation is done for good, story-clarifying reasons, the editorial ends justify the graphic means.



AUTHOR.

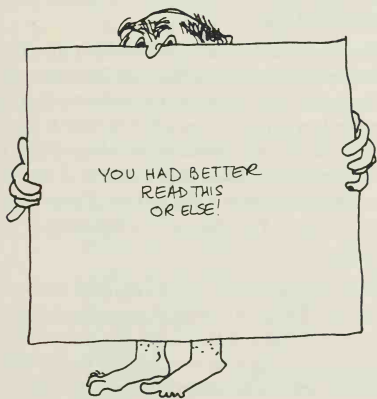
...and the last and most crucial question of all:

16. Do the editor(s) and designer(s) like each other, respect each other as professionals, realize they can and must work together as a team, keep each other informed and involved, understand each other's potentials, sympathize with each other's problems, and have lunch together regularly?



If they don't, then no amount of searching questions or clever advice is going to help, not even reading this chapter.

The “so-what,” “wowiee,” and “s’posed-to” syndromes



YOU can't expect people to care about your story before they delve into it. After all, they have no idea what it contains or why they should give a damn about it. Reading requires effort. It is work. It demands a decision on the potential reader's part to commit time and energy. That is a

lot to ask on faith and memory of past performance alone.

That's why you have to sell. To persuade uncaring, uninterested, uninvolved, lackadaisical page-flipping lookers into settling down and becoming readers, you first have to hook them. And you must bait the hook with irresistibly attractive gobbets of information. And what makes these gobbets inviting?

1. Their inherent interest: obviously the story must pack value.
2. The self-interest of the reader: the "what's in it for me?" ingredient.
3. The clever presentation: lucid, transparent exposition of good ideas.

It's all in the presentation

Forget publishing and think about another service industry. You expect the food in a fine restaurant to be made of the freshest ingredients, deliciously spiced, artfully presented. The way it looks makes it that much more valuable. It is beguiling, fun, oh yummy—who cares how much it'll set you back (or how many excess calories you'll have to work off tomorrow). The sensuous temptation is worth every cent.

Here, presentation is not regarded as a cosmetic luxury, but as an integral ingredient of the product. The ambience of the room, the grace of service, the lighting, noises, smells, all add up to enhanced expectation and something special. The arrangement on the plate, the gleaming silver, sparkling crystal, and brilliant napery combine to increase perceived value. Not only do you leave satisfied, but you are ready to return for more.

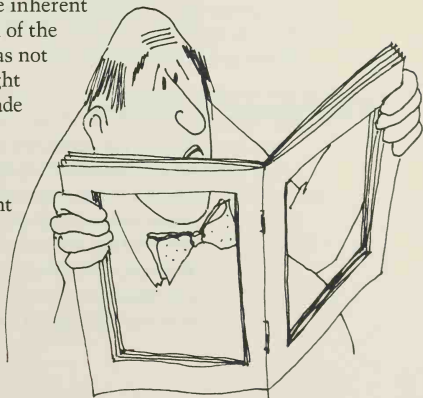
In our information-vending and reader-persuasion industry, presentation is as vital as clever news-

gathering, canny circulation tactics, subtle ad sales, and all the other factors that combine to make for publishing success.

Design works on two levels for you. First, it creates a personality for the product. It is the basic "you" that readers, advertisers, and your family recognize. Second, it helps to make the content irresistibly appealing. It is like that restaurant: not only in the surroundings and ambience, but also in the composition of that succulent cutlet tucked around with *pommes de terre persillés*, the mushroom caps and broccoli fleurets with the dollop of creamy sauce and . . . oh, boy!

The "so-what" syndrome

If your potential reader looks at a page and reacts with a shrug and a "So-what?" you've lost that sale. If a reader fails to respond positively, it may be because the subject is of no interest (you can't hope to fascinate everybody with everything all the time). Or, what is more likely, a reader may not have been persuaded to pay attention owing to the poor appearance of the material. Not because it looks UGLY (what is beauty and who is to judge it?), but because it looks DULL. The inherent fascination of the material has not been brought out and made visible. Its capacity to compel involvement has not been fulfilled.



The fault is not the designer's. It is the fault of the editing process. All too often, the editors have failed to take the design into account before it is too late: the words are written, set in immutable type, and the page can only become a "pleasing arrangement" of the preordained elements. Then you hunt around for a picture to relieve the greyness. How about a cartoon? All too often, the word-people merely report the information with a take-it-or-leave-it attitude and expect readers to go digging out the nuggets for themselves. And the design people make up the page so it will make a spectacular sample in their portfolio.

If only the editors had gotten together with the designers to analyze the story find its significance to the reader, in order to make it visible. They would have rewritten it from the reader's point of view, because they would have known what those nuggets were that needed exposing. And the designers would have laid it out with those nuggets right there on the surface. The skimmer would have noticed them, been intrigued by them, picked them up—and become a reader.

Look at your product the way the skimmer/lookers see it. They don't know all that you know. Is what you know hidden in the body of the story, or is it made clear and visible? Does the design camouflage, or does it expose?

The "wowie!" syndrome

This is the opposite of the "so-what" syndrome. Where "so-what" undersells by forgetting all about salesmanship, "wowie" oversells by forcing in too much salesmanship. It is usually of the wrong kind. Too much screaming is as off-putting as too much dullness. Too many headlines, too many typefaces, too many bangs; explosions of color, trickery, stars; pictures and type at funny angles—they just cancel



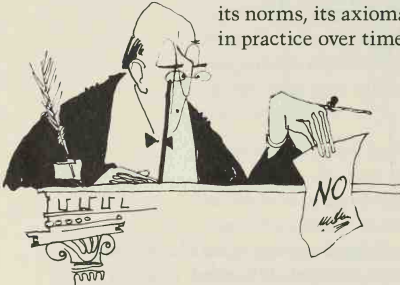
one another out. Such a frenetic babble of visual voices cannot be penetrated. Besides, it doesn't look serious and so it undermines the credibility of the overall product. Worst of all, it robs the editors of one of their most precious tools: the capacity to emphasize. It is through emphasis that editorial hierarchies are communicated. The reader gauges the importance of information by the way it is handled on the page. Its size and placement are visual clues to intellectual interpretation. Where there are no patterns, there can be no clues the reader can depend on to decipher the priorities.

A publication must not be a showcase for visual cleverness. It must be a showcase for the content, the meaning, the import, the substance, the usefulness, the significance of the story to the reader. The function of presentation is to expose them and bring them to the reader's attention. Therefore the editor's job is to define them and point them out to the designers, so that the designers can use their vitally important skills to dramatize them and make them clear, vivid,

memorable. Look at your product dispassionately. Forget the awards. See it the way the recipient sees it. Does the design get in the way of the stories?

The “s’posed-to” syndrome

We all work with traditions, conventional wisdoms, habits, and thought patterns. Every profession has its norms, its axiomatic beliefs, its standards proven in practice over time. Newcomers are programmed



to accept them as Revealed Truth learned at the master’s feet (be it in academia, on the job, or even from how-to books). Many of our standardized techniques have become standardized precisely because they work so well for both the producer and the recipient. It would be folly not to take reader-expectations and reader-habits into account. How they see and interpret our offerings is vital to our success in communicating with them.

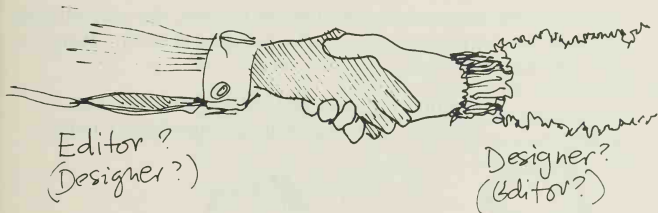
Too often, however, the traditional formulas are unthinking substitutes for original analytical thought. What is worse, they are unanswerable arguments against risk: “You can’t do that because it’s not the right way to do it . . . it’s never done . . . we’ve never done it that way before . . . they won’t understand it . . . mugshots must look into the page . . . the heads at the top of the page are supposed to be bigger than the ones at the bottom . . . trapped space is bad . . . all important words in headlines have always had their first letters capitalized . . . what’s right in newspapers is right . . .” and so it

goes: the clotted brain saying "No" to creative thought and blue-penciling all fresh approaches. Innovation, originality, expressiveness are suspect. Slogans substitute for research. Nostrums supplant thought. Look at your product coldly: count the clichés. Ask, Why? If you don't get depressed, congratulations.

Stop, look, and read

The first step is to accept the need for medicine. Diagnosis of specifics can follow. Then you can start to bridge the gap—between What and How, between Content and Form, between Words with pictures, and the Layout. Analyzing what is important, and then giving it requisite visibility, is an intellectual game.

It melds the verbal with the visual. It presupposes an understanding of the significance of the material by both the word-oriented and visual-oriented



members of the editorial team. The editors determine the direction and the thrust. The designers determine how to communicate it vibrantly.

They must think and act in concert. They must respect each others' needs and honor each others' contributions to their common product. They must like each other as people. They must cooperate as technicians. The writers and the editors must prepare and organize their material bearing its

visual transmutation in mind: it cannot exist except as visual marks on paper. It makes sense to plan for them in order to make the most of the capabilities of the medium.

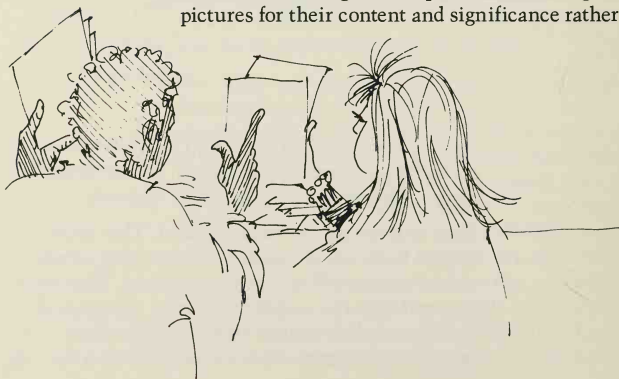
For example:

If the text is written with type in mind, it will be possible to plan for typographic emphasis: if the key ideas are placed at the start or end of a text run, they can be popped out by contrasting size, boldness, color, or even isolation.

(All that is much harder to do if they are buried in the middle. It is also nigh on impossible to retrofit text. It is very unpopular to ask someone to rewrite "just to make it look nicer.")

If the designers are enthusiastic about the subject, understand what the story is about, and why it is being published, they are less likely to complain that there is too much text. They may also come up with a better, more direct headline. (The more edit-oriented the visual people become, the more valuable they become. Editorial design is as much editing as it is designing.)

If editors and designers cooperate in choosing pictures for their content and significance rather



than for their visual prettiness, the images will be stronger partners in the information-transmission process.

That is what the primary purpose of pictures is. They aren't amusements, surface decorations, or stuff to bamboozle the looker into thinking the product is easier to take than it is.

(The more visually oriented the word-people become, the more valuable they become. Writing and editing publications is as much a visual art as it is a verbal one.)

Respect the reader's time

If verbal and visual people both understand how the structure of the writing is organized, it can be given a visible format to help guide the reader through it. Being able to find elements is vitally important, especially in longer pieces. Making things easy to find respects the reader's lack of time.

It also accepts the fact that few readers read consecutively. They peck and skip around. Exposing the structure allows them to skip what they deem unimportant or less interesting. At least they'll stop at what to them is more important and more exciting. That's better than skipping the entire piece because it looks so daunting. ("I'll come back to that later.") Oh yeah?

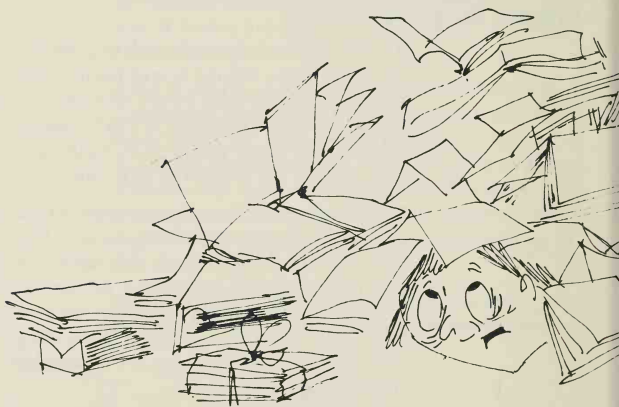
The editor who understands the improved communication value that canny presentation brings, tailors the editing to the visual process. Only when the form expresses the content is that skimmer persuaded to stop, look, and read.

If that logical format is based on analytical judgment untrammelled by fear of innovation, then success is assured.

Successful communication has nothing to do with handsomeness, attractiveness, or any other objec-

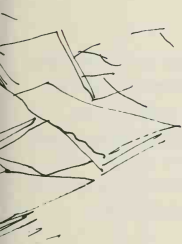
tive aesthetic. If everything is done for cogent, functional reasons the result can look awful but it will be successful nonetheless. Nobody can say "so what?" Nor can anybody be distracted by "wowie" surprises.

Instead, readers will pass from impression to impression as the pages are turned, and will be halted by substantive highlights rather than by a surface fungus whose only function is to be "pretty." Irresistible fascination ensues when form and content reinforce each other. In ideal communication they are one and the same.



Considerate typography

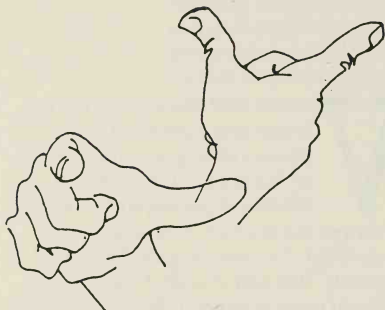
WORDS are Donald's life: talker, writer, poet, savorer of the niceties of language and thought, he had the fun of earning his livelihood playing with words as a brilliant copywriter at a New York ad agency—until he went blind. Can you imagine the frustration? Fortunately, although Donald is legally blind, he can make out some printing if the circumstances are right. The other day when I was at his house, he showed me a book he had been reveling in.



The satisfaction he felt was intense. That was because the book wasn't good just from the point of view of content, but because it also worked as a physical object in combining shape, size, color, texture, and typography—in blending content and form perfectly. That's why he could read it. It was the typography he appreciated so much. Wordsmith that he is, he blurted out a phrase so startling in its clarifying insight that I have been unable to forget it. It opens up a whole new view of what we designers, editors, type-handlers, all of us, ought to be doing. He said, "Y'know, that's what I call *considerate* typography."

Think about that for a minute. It is reader-oriented and user-friendly, a phrase that should be like a commandment to us. What it says is this: if we are to have our messages accepted, we had damned well

better make them acceptable! And that does not mean sugar-coating them or dressing them up. It does not mean cosmetic cover-ups or superficial packaging. It does mean understanding our messages as well as our medium and combining the two into a harmonious blend that works well for our readers and also for us.



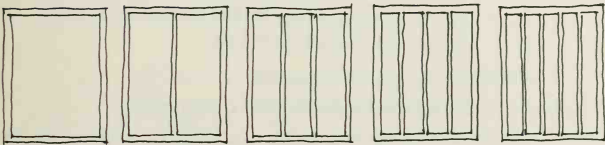
Being just information-disseminators is not enough; that's merely one segment of our necessary skills and insights. We must also become publication-makers, understanding that our product is an object in its own right—a piece of industrial design—that must also fulfill its own function if the information we entrust to it is to become accessible to the audience we want to reach.

Long ago, the printed word was an exquisitely tended product because it was destined for an appreciative patron. However, as the three R's became available to ever-growing numbers, and as technology helped increase print distribution, the standards established in an earlier age began to erode. Pages were filled up with ever-smaller type, so small that it defied the reader to read it. (The people read, however, because they needed the information. But what had been a pleasure was turned into a task.) All sorts of typographic ornamentations were added to the mix, and a sequence of fashion-oriented changes took place.

Now, a new technological revolution has overtaken us, one that enables us to do absolutely anything we have a mind to do on the page. No longer are we restricted by the mechanical processes of typesetting and makeup. Anything we imagine we can achieve—so our freedom to make idiots of ourselves is unlimited. But we can turn these new tools of ours to our advantage (no, to the reader's advantage) with a new attitude highlighting a new objective—creating considerate typography. Let's take a look at two factors: one that can save us from making complete messes of the job, and the other, which can prevent us from making real improvements to the product—habit patterns and proven principles.

1. Habit patterns

Habits are unthinking behavior patterns, by definition: We simply accept certain ways of doing things as if they were natural, not-to-be questioned, inescapable laws. For instance, nobody (except ad space salespeople) demands that a magazine page be divided into three columns or two columns. Such a

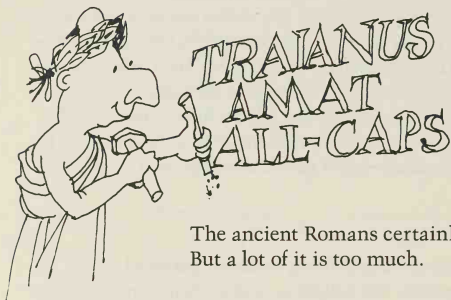


structure affects the scale of everything fitted into it, and that's why almost any magazine looks like almost any other. Yet compare magazines to annual reports that use the same basic page size but encourage visual diversity (and have no hang-ups about column structure and you'll see the difference immediately). Don't be put off by all that four-color stuff—just compare the patterning.

Of course we have to accommodate standard-size, small-space ads on the pages that mix editorial with

ads. But why box ourselves in elsewhere, especially in feature stories? Here's a collection of other such typographic slogans we accept as axiomatic—but which are nothing more than *banal platitudes*:

Setting anything in all-caps is the kiss of death.



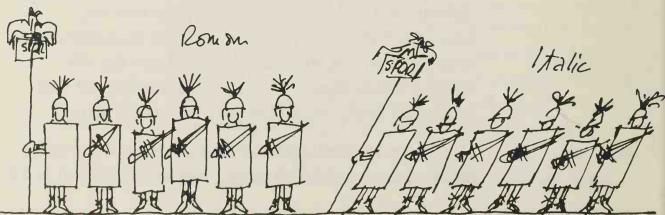
The ancient Romans certainly didn't find it to be so. But a lot of it is too much.

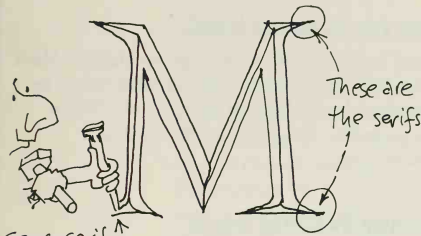
Anything set smaller than 10 point is hard to read.

That's nonsense: some 10-point type looks gigantic, some minuscule. It depends on the design of the face and its x-height. Pay no attention to mathematical pigeonholing—examine the visual result. That's what matters, after all.

Italics are harder to read than roman.

Depends on how much type there is and how it is handled. Many of the newer italic versions are considerably easier on the eye than some romans. It's what you do with the stuff that matters.





Sans-serif
means
"without
serifs"

Sans-serif type is harder to read than serif.

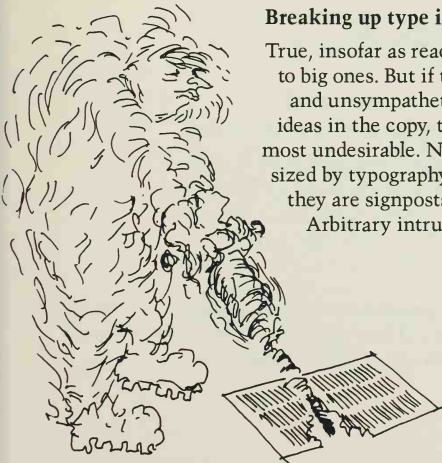
It all depends on what material you learned to read with as a kid. Sans-serif is what European kids learn to read with, so they find it just as easy as we find Century Schoolbook or Primer or Textype. It is all a matter of training. Yes, it's true that serifs move the eye sideways, but that's an advantage that can be balanced by using sans-serif cleverly.

Widows are bad.

Not within the copy, they aren't! They bring air and variety to the texture and thus help maintain visual interest. Granted, they ought to be avoided at the tops of columns.

Breaking up type is desirable.

True, insofar as readers prefer small chunks to big ones. But if the breakup is arbitrary and unsympathetic to the flow of the ideas in the copy, then such a breakup is most undesirable. Natural breaks emphasized by typography are indeed helpful: they are signposts along the reader's way. Arbitrary intrusions just confuse.



Running type in reverse is bad.

Anything unusual (like white type on black or black type on a halftone) is risky and therefore has to be handled cleverly and knowledgeably to fulfill its desired purposes. You have to consider the risk/reward ratio.

Ragged-right looks like poetry.

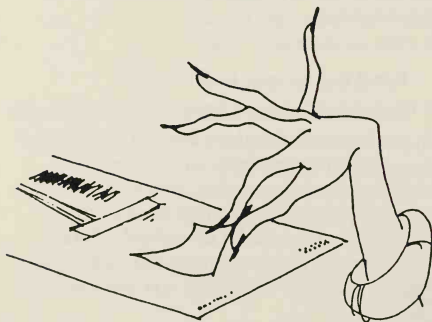
A quarter of a century ago, ragged-right was restricted to poetry-setting. No longer is that true: It is commonplace now.

Ragged-right will scare off readers because it looks peculiar.

It won't because it doesn't. Not any more.

White space is a designer's self indulgence.

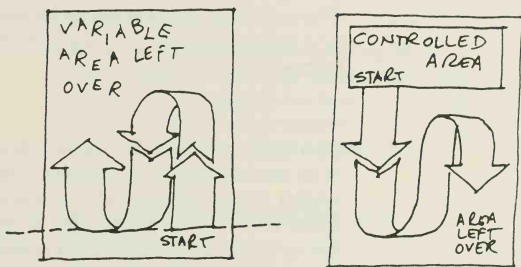
Filling up every cranny of space with words may well mean more information per square centimeter,



but what's the use of such muchness if nobody will read it? "That looks like a hell of a lot, I'll come back to it." . . . (Do you ever?)

Justifying columns is essential.

Why do we have to have a neat edge across the bottom of each page? Whoever looks down there? It is the tops of the pages that matter because those are the areas seen first. Furthermore, the most crucial area of the page is where we put the headline. Yet it is that very area that is allowed to be too large and empty or too small and too filled up—just in order to allow the story's tail end to fit precisely in the place that matters the least!



As a result, the valuable rhythmic impressions that story-starts ought to have are sacrificed to some foolish principle of filling out the column-bottoms—and the product disintegrates where it matters: at the top.

Full-to-the-brim looks daunting.

A bit of emptiness adds palatability to the package. This is just canny salesmanship that has nothing to do with "art." Yet designers are stigmatized as wastrels because they are aware of the utility of such contrast and try to build it in, whereas editors and publishers deem it to be prodigal of precious space—they say they cannot afford such luxuries. Well, the best way to save money in publishing is not to publish at all.

Cheap typesetting is just as good as quality typesetting.

The distinguished art and craft of typography developed over centuries by sensitive craftsmen/artists cannot be handed over to an indifferent typist keyboarding a machine (however marvelous the technology) with results of equal excellence and stature. The reader feels the difference in terms of the piece's ease of reading, charm, and comfort.

It is a false economy to cut back on investment in quality, believing the reader won't know the difference. The best way to save money in publishing is to stop publishing . . . or did I say that somewhere before?

That ought to be enough to make the point. We live in an environment of self-imposed restrictions we seldom, if ever, question. We don't even notice them. That's how much we take them for granted, just as we ignore the crisscrossing telephone and electric lines that form the wire cage we live in. Just become conscious of the "wirescape" you drive under next time you're at the wheel.

2. Proven principles

It is not easy to distinguish between those unthinking habit patterns listed above and the valid proven principles, because they are related. To list some of the undeniable truths it is necessary to go back to square one. And even there, there are no rules, no formulas, no certainties. Nothing can be quantified or proven, nor does anything work in all circumstances all the time. There are just too many factors valid in varying degrees in any given situation. Some of them:



The typeface itself.

Some faces are undoubtedly more legible than others. Common sense determines which. But a rule of thumb could be formulated. If the reader becomes conscious of the type, then it is a bad face because the best face is the invisible one.

The appropriateness of the face to the circumstances.

When you drop words out from a background, the face chosen should be simple and bold with strokes of even thickness so lines don't fill up, and larger than if you were running it black on white.

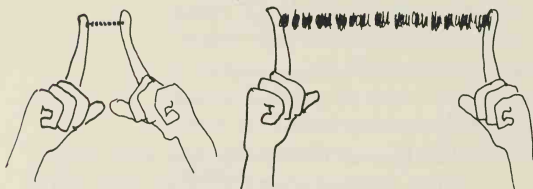
When you print on newsprint using fast, crude presses, your chosen face ought to be properly tough—with open counters to prevent filling up, well-rounded curves, sensible uniformity of thicks and thins.

When you are doing an annual report for one of the Fortune 500 on cast-coated 100-pound stock run on seven-color presses in Switzerland, you can risk using the most delicate of curves and thinnest of serifs. When you are going to be running lots of pictures all the time, you'll want an unobtrusive

face that won't compete with the pictures . . . and so forth. Common sense, of course.

The ratio of type size to line length

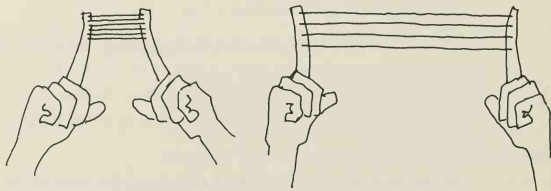
The longer the line, the larger the type ought to be. The shorter the line, the smaller the size can be.



That's because you don't want to stray too far from the comfortable reading length of about $1\frac{1}{2}$ alphabet lengths—42 characters. As a general rule. Unless circumstances dictate otherwise. (Nothing is sacrosanct.)

The ratio of line length to interlinear spacing.

The longer the lines, the wider the space between them (what used to be called leading) needs to be.

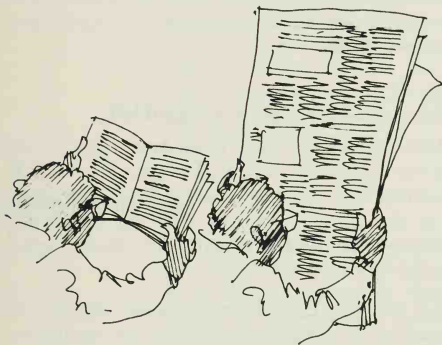


That's because you have to guide the reader's eye back to the start of the next line to continue smooth reading. If the distance between the left-hand edge and the right-hand edge of the column is too great, it is difficult for the eye to return to the right spot without getting lost along the way: the sliver of space creates rails for the eye to follow.

What the copy is about and how it is written.

Is the copy an easy-to-follow narrative, or is it an itemized, didactic series? Is it a scientific treatise laced with formulas and sequential facts—or a bunch of self-contained short takes related to an umbrella headline?

Is it a fascinating exposé of political skullduggery or a listing of employee job changes? Each deserves its proper format—something better than 9/10 Times Roman x 13½ picas.



The ratio of number of pages to text.

A 16-page solid text think-piece is a very different kind of animal from a one-page editorial. Yet we inevitably set them the same way: 10/11 Century Expanded x 21 picas. Why? Have we no other ways of expressing the difference?

The way the copy is organized into segments.

On the one hand, copy may not be organized at all; on the other, the story may be written in support of the headline in proposition/proof style.

The first calls for no subheads to break it up; the second calls for a visual typographic structure that clearly signals each component.

The decision about justified or ragged-right setting.

Ragged-right retains the optimal spacing between characters and words and so keeps the visual rhythm constant all the way through the text. The eye doesn't stumble, and that makes for easy reading. However, proponents of justified typesetting maintain that the rhythm of full-line reading is of overriding importance and that justifying creates neater and thus more inviting pages.

The use of flush-right and ragged-left.

There are circumstances when such sinning is not merely appropriate, but justified (pun intended). If there isn't too much of it and the lines aren't too long, you can get away with it. All you have to do is overcome the problem of getting the reader's eye to the correct next-line start.

That isn't easy if you have no smooth edge for it to return to. By reducing the distance the eye has to travel, you ensure success.

By keeping the flush-right/ragged left lines as short as possible, you ensure the reader's continuing goodwill. And that's one of your most important jobs.

The use of paragraph indents or spaces between paragraphs.

Readers are used to both techniques. The choice ought to depend on the visual context in which they'll be seen.

To use half-lines of space between paragraphs on a page that is already broken up into several story units so disintegrates the text that the type falls apart and all you have is a measly spottiness.

It isn't just ugly (one could live with that), it's confusing to readers who don't grasp the page's organization at first glance the way they really ought to.

These are just some of the more obvious criteria on which to base typographic judgment. Each affects the others to a greater or lesser degree as circumstances demand, but the whole is a ticket of intertwined requirements. Yes, it is terrifying. It takes a lifetime of use and study to master the necessary skills to be right in most choices. (You can't ever be right 100 percent of the time.)

A simple shortcut

But there is a shortcut that might be useful. Next time you spec copy, think of Donald and his need for considerate typography. You'll find that a number of decisions will have been made for you already. It's just like waking up in the morning with solutions to your problems. All you need to do is put them into practice.

How to use color functionally

COLOR is suddenly inundating all of publishing. What used to be too expensive is becoming commonplace. No wonder its users are behaving like children with a new box of crayons.

Color must not be used just to dazzle and catch the eye. Jazzing up the page only camouflages the underlying message. Color must be used to enlighten, and so add value to the product. It has nothing to do with “liking” or artistic aesthetics. It must be used deliberately because it is a visual language that can focus attention, explain relationships, analyze data. It should be used to give visual order to information chaos. It can do it by:

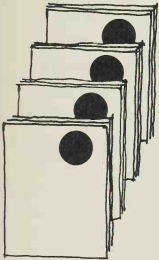
- Sharpening the delivery of a message by color-coding the elements.
- Ranking value by the sequence in which elements are noticed.
- Increasing the velocity of comprehension by relating segments to each other.

- Establishing identity and character through consistency.
- Creating continuity through remembered color-keyed associations.
- Enlivening the atmosphere of the product.

Fifty more points to consider for color in print and presentations.

Color in print

1. Don't use color just because it is available. Don't decorate with it. Sharpen the message: explain, highlight, emphasize, lead the eye.
2. Decide what you want the viewer to understand, then use color to make it obvious.
3. Emphasize the benefits, so the viewers' self-interest will pull them into reading.
4. Highlight instructions. The manual will be easier to use when instructions are separated from descriptions.
5. Run introductions, summaries, change revisions, etc., in color as a separate category so they look different from the text.
6. Don't gaudily color rules, bullets, bars, and all those other doodads, unless you have a good reason. It's hackneyed, and visually the color is only added for the wrong reason: its own sake.
7. Use color to link separate elements.
8. Use the same color scheme for all signals, signposts, logos, etc. The viewer will recognize them faster.
9. Reveal the structure of the publication with color on major divisions or sections, such as chapter openers. Plan the product for such patterning.



10. Establish personality with consistent color. It provides continuity and familiarity, vital for corporate identity.
11. Never pick a color just because you "like it." The color must help interpret the message appropriately.
 - A banana's yellowness is one of the characteristics of bananahood.
 - Flecks of brown tell us the banana is ripening.
 - An all-brown banana is rotten.
 - A green banana is unripe.
 - A blue banana is frozen.
 - A purple banana was drawn by a child.
 - A striped banana is deliberately shocking.
 - A multicolored banana is a joke.
 - A red banana is a plantain.
12. The more colors you use, the gaudier the result. Do you really want fruit salad?
13. Four distinct colors are a practical maximum for the average viewer to remember. Two colors plus black are remembered best.
14. Use color-coding consistently throughout a document or group of documents.
15. Duplicate color-coding with shape. Make the important line on a graph not just red but also fat. Redundancy attracts attention more powerfully, is more memorable, makes black-and-white copying more intelligible. Duplication of color with shape also facilitates translation from one medium into another, and helps people with impaired color vision.
16. Big areas need paler, quieter color to avoid overwhelming the message. It is the message that matters, not the color.
17. Small areas can have strong, bright color.

18. Warm colors appear closer, cool colors farther away. Dark colors appear heavier than light ones. So an area looks smaller in dark color than the same-sized area in a light color.

19. Surroundings alter the way a color looks. The same color looks darker on a light background, lighter on a dark background, warmer on a cool background, cooler on a warm background. And the texture and the color of the paper plays a role: colors look darker on uncoated paper than they do on coated paper. Check samples. Run tests. Talk to the printer.

20. Choose colors that relate to each other in one or more attributes: hue, value, or chroma. Hue means "red," "blue," "green." Value means "lightness" or "darkness." Chroma means intensity of hue, its "dullness" or "brilliance."

21. Use aggressive colors to identify the gist; subdue supporting information with shy colors as background.

22. Set type larger and bolder when it is destined to be run in color. No matter how "bright" the color, colored type contrasts with white paper less than black type does. Compensate by enlarging the type's area to be covered with colored ink.

23. Bright colors tire the eye. Avoid using them for text, because nobody will read more than the first sentence.

24. Use large sizes, and simple, straightforward typefaces for type in color. Don't use faces that are exaggerated in boldness or condensation. They are hard to read at the best of times.

25. Be sure that there is at least a 30% difference in tone value between the type and its background color, especially when dropping out type in white. Always compare your color with a gray scale. Don't be fooled by the brightness of the color.

24pt light
BLACK
COLOR
30pt bold

26. Watch out for the vibration produced by complementary colors of equal tonality. Orange/blue, red/green, yellow/purple are unpleasant next to each other, unless there is a strong difference in darkness between them.

27. Avoid washing out black-and-white photos by running them in color. If you must, use only the darkest browns, greens, or blues.

28: You sacrifice sparkle by running a black-and-white photo on a screen of color because the color fills in the highlights. You pay a high price for a cheap effect.

29. Duotones made from black-and-white photos reinforce the dark areas while keeping the highlights light. The two halftones can be run in any color you wish to produce startling effects. This is where you should experiment and be bold. Tritones are even more fun.

30. Use mezzotints, posterizations, polarizations, and all those other technical manipulations when their specialness adds just the graphic dash you need. Too much spice spoils the stew.

Color in presentations

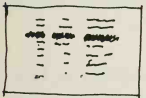
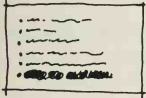
31. See Item 1: the same applies in presentations.

32. Coordinate the presentation as a flowing sequence of impressions supporting the speaker's words. It must not draw attention to itself.

33. People will look at the brightest area first. Assign the brightest color to the most important material.



34. Draw attention to one point with color: one slice of a pie, one graph trend, one row of figures, one



verbal point, one bar or column, the bottom line, the focal point of the equipment under discussion.

35. Tie visuals into a flow by identifying a recurring theme by color. The components of your sequence of impressions must have visual continuity.

36. Use color to help the audience sort out the information. Distinguish one set of elements from another.

37. Build the presentation to a climax with color sequencing. Start with cool green and change from slide to slide till you wind up with brilliant orange. Start with a dark slide and end up with a white one in hardly perceptible gradations. Presentations are showbiz.

38. Signal changes in the direction of the presentation by a startling change in color. Turn the slide vertically, too. The audience will realize that "here begins something new!"

39. Make only one point per visual, and make it vivid and fast. Pretend your visuals are billboards. You can't make them too simple.

40. Concentrate on the nub of the message in the visual. Avoid long blocks of copy. The supporting evidence should be spoken and in the handouts.

41. Break up complex thoughts into components, one per visual. Build them up to a climax.

42. For formal presentations in dark rooms to large audiences, make the backgrounds of slides dark. Reverse the type out from the background.

43. On dark backgrounds (black, blue, grey, brown, green) drop out type in light colors. Though white has "no color" and so we think it must be boring, it shows up brightest on a dark background. It is therefore the most valuable, and should be reserved for the vital points. Yellow is equally visible, but a little



aggressive, so it should be used with circumspection; red should be used sparingly. Supporting matter can be shown in any other color.

44. For informal presentations in light rooms to small groups, make the backgrounds of overheads or slides pale. The best color is no color at all, so the screen blends into the surroundings. The type should be dark on a light background.

45. Use simple type for slides and overheads and pay special attention to legibility. Slides and overheads are a different medium from hard-copy printouts. What works on the printed page does not necessarily obtain for transparencies.

- It is probably wisest to use a sans-serif type, but not one that is too exaggerated in boldness or too condensed.
- Avoid mixing more than two type families. Less is more.
- Avoid more than three sizes of type. Big for the heading, medium for the body text, tiny for asides.
- Avoid type smaller than 18 point for overheads. It is hard to read from the third row.
- Avoid all-capitals except for a word or two. They are harder to read fast than lowercase.
- Avoid italics except for short sentences. They are harder to read than roman.
- Avoid fancy type unless it improves understanding. It pulls attention to itself.
- Avoid bulleted lists, if you possibly can. They are a bore. Like this one.

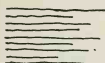
46. Leave generous margins around the outer edges of the visuals.

This is static



47. Start at the top-left corner, because that is where we start reading. Flush-left the text under it. Flush-left/ragged-right text can be scanned faster than centered copy. Besides, it gives a more active effect than formalized centering, which looks much more static.

This is active



48. Place the most important information at the top, because that is where we are used to looking for it.

49. The placement of the top line should be the same throughout the series, as should the space between recurring elements. It shows the presentation was carefully thought through and precisely wrought, which enhances credibility.

50. Consistent patterning, layout, and color are the ideal foundation if you want to build in excitement, because even a small inconsistency is noticed as a Major Event.

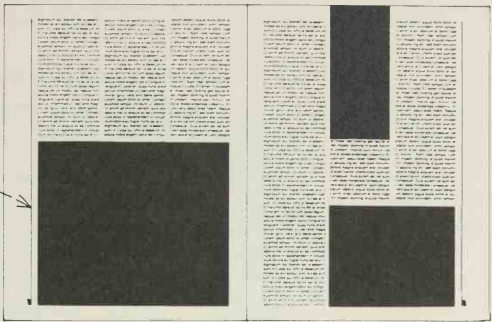
Grids—not necessarily the publisher's best friend

HAS it ever occurred to you why it is that an 8½-inch wide magazine page is invariably broken up into either three columns or two columns? There is no law that stipulates such an arrangement! It is just a habit traceable back to the need to accommodate advertising and then filling up the space left over with supporting editorial matter.

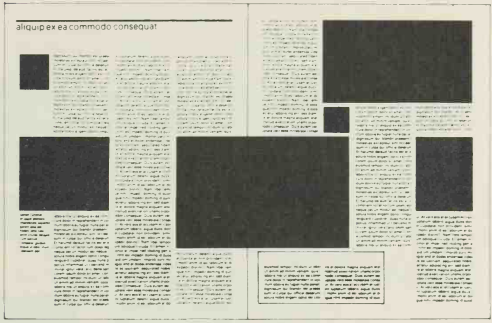
Since the ads are based on a standardized set of dimensions (effectively utilizing a third of the page, or a half of the page sideways), it follows logically that the resultant editorial column widths be half-page or one-third-page widths as well. It makes best use of the space as well as common sense in typesetting.

Aha! But what about publications that carry no ads? What indeed! There is no earthly reason why they should be shackled to this dulling pattern. Dulling? Yes, because it is expected. By definition, anything that is expected cannot be UNexpected. And it is

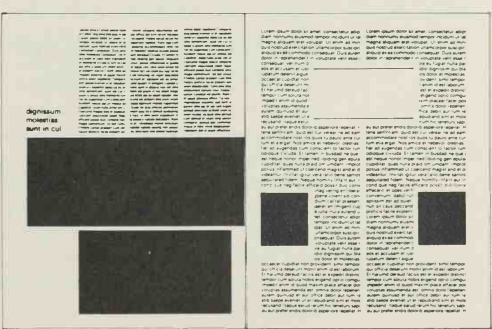
The usual
three columns,
but with an
additional
outside rule
to embellish
and to define
the space.



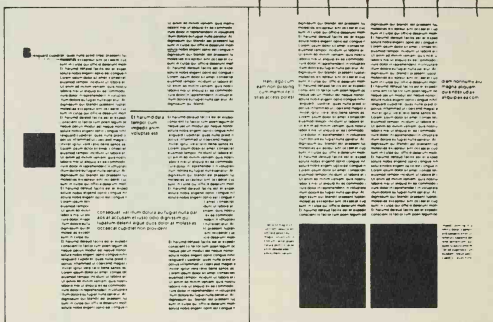
Three columns
narrower than
the maximum
can be imposed
in a variety
of positions



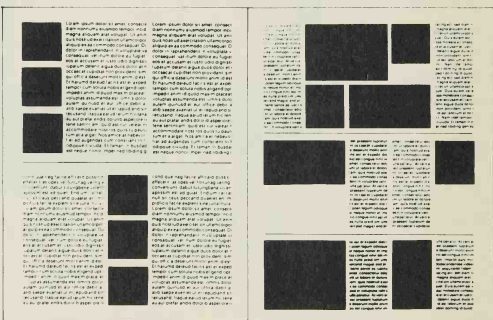
Four-column
measure
used singly
or
doubled-up



Six equal-width columns used selectively with text or microelements e.g. subheads or pictures



Five equal columns used doubled-up or singly



precisely the Unexpected that gives your product a startling, original, lively image.

Taking it a step further: there is no "rightness" or "wrongness" to typography. It is a subtle art and much depends on personal interpretation and judgment. But some generalizations that make overall sense have been evolved over the years. One of them—possibly the most important—is this: to read smoothly, there must be an appropriate set of relationships of proportions that affect three aspects of any type set:

1. The size of the type used
2. The line length in which that particular size of type will be used
3. The space between the lines

The narrower the column (i.e., the shorter the line length), the smaller the type size that ought properly to be used in it, and the tighter the line spacing can be. Conversely, the wider the column (i.e., the longer the line length) the bigger the type size ought to be, and the more space that should be inserted between those lines.

Alas, there is no mathematical formula that can be devised to express this relationship. There are just too many variables—many strongly affected by the design of the typeface chosen. Each typeface has its own characteristics—such things as its overall “color” (its darkness or lightness), its texture, its crispness, its relationship of thick and thin strokes in the individual letter, its horizontal quality emphasized by the serifs (or lack of them), which help to bind the letters into word groups . . . and so forth. So you have to go by experience and/or advice you can trust.

But this typographic subtlety is incidental to the point I’m making. What is crucial here is that once you realize the effect the column width has on the size of the type that column will contain, you will also realize that the effect on your product can be extremely varied.

Big type shouts, little type whispers

The different scales of expression implied by narrow columns filled with tiny type and set tight, contrasted to extremely wide columns filled with large type and spaced far apart, provide the canny editor with a variety of different tones of voice and

thus with a variety of modes of expression of the story. The intensity of effect can vary according to the value of each item. It can be whispered, it can be spoken normally, or it can be shouted from the rooftops. In fact, the product becomes more flexible and thus more responsive to the editor's needs.

Readers notice at first glance what the editor wishes them to notice first—simply because bigness attracts more attention than smallness. We use this elementary principle in headlines as a matter of course. Why not extend it to the rest of the product? Why must we suffer from the rigidities of newspaper makeup where—for the sake of speed and flexibility—a single-column width makes sense? Few magazines have such time and production requirements. Our restrictions are self-imposed: just habits. Or we've never really thought about it. Or, as is most likely, the system was already there when we came, having been suggested by the printer eons ago.

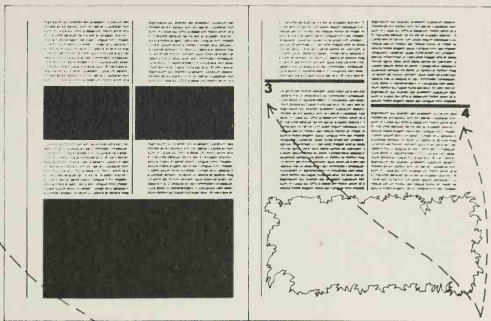
Variety of expression results from variety in columns

Okay. To say that freedom of approach is desirable is no help to anybody. It is a principle on which we can all agree. Where do we go from there? What the busy editor needs, it seems to me, is specific data: templates, patterns, dimensions readily applicable, without having to invent them from scratch, so that they are just as ready to put on as that 2-column/3-column straitjacket.

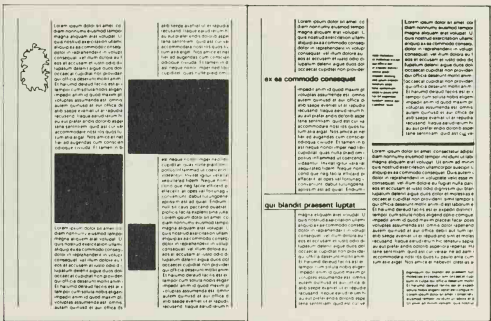
To get a clearer understanding of what I mean, look at the examples on the following pages.

The differences between the schemes on the following pages look minuscule. So they are. But the minutae add up to remarkable differences. Some are better suited to running text with sidebar illustrations. Some are ideal for making the most of the variety picture layouts need—where text plays a supporting role. The fun comes in picking the arrangement that is just right for your material.

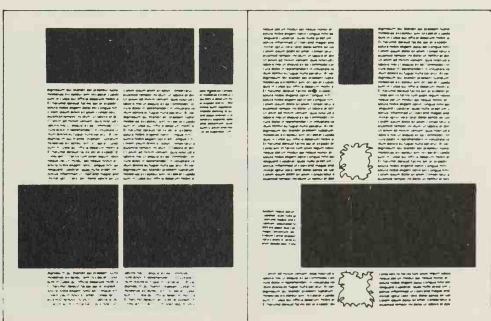
Two columns
of standard
width text
indented to
allow for
attention-
getting
outtriggers



Four columns
of varied
widths:
thin, fat,
thin, fat



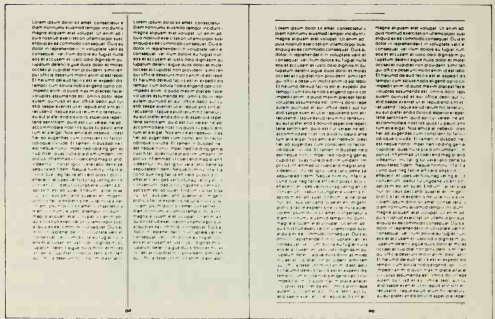
Five narrow
columns
doubled-up
for text,
with an
extra-wide
margin



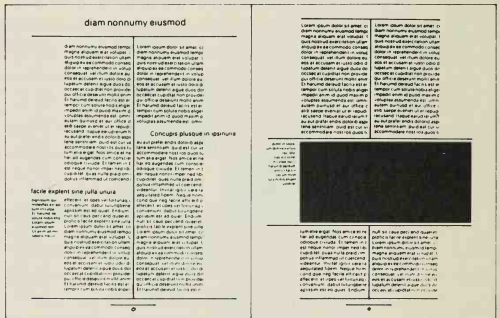
Two-column arrangement centered on the page:

left: "hanging" from above

right: encased in horizontal rules

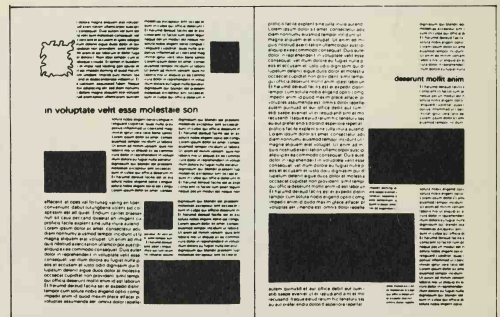


Two columns narrower than the maximum centered on the page, with extensions sideways into the margins

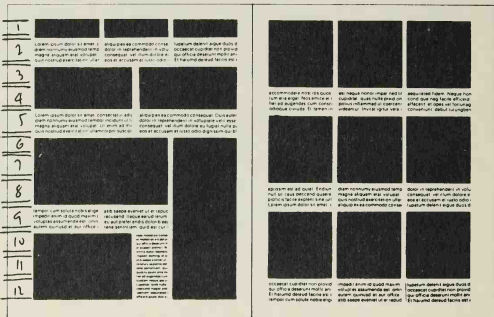


Left: six columns combined in various groupings.

Right: Four columns combined in various groupings



True grids divide the vertical dimension into equal segments. Show here are 12 such units



Using different column structures allows you to coordinate the contents with the form: ought the material be insignificant (tiny type in narrow columns) or ought it to be imposing (large type in an extra-wide column)? This is where scale—the visual expression of editorial importance—comes into play. Different column structures can help *improve* communication by making the message clearer to the reader *at first glance*.

That will inevitably make the page more interesting. It may not make the page prettier, but who cares? Prettiness is not important. What is important is whether the page is **effective**.

PS: Can you mix different column structures in different areas of your publication? Why not? Just keep the typefaces the same, so there is at least one consistent visual characteristic to hold the publication together.

Why, when, and how to redesign

PUBLISHERS usually decide every few years that it's time to give their magazine a face-lift. And that means a whole new set of headaches for everyone involved in the publication-making process—from the editor-in-chief right down to the lady who dispenses aspirin to harrassed art directors. Here's some advice to avoid the misery.

Four reasons for not redesigning

1. Never change looks just for the sake of changing looks.

That's phony! You redesign from a position of strength, never from weakness. And a superficial redesign is perceived as a sign of weakness, even a sign of desperation (at least that's how the competition is likely to label it).

2. Never redesign from boredom.

You are bored with your product because you live with the wretched thing 24 hours a day; your customers and investors spend 30 minutes with it. They may be bored—but their boredom is more likely to be from the content than from the form.

3. Never redesign to show how clever and with-it you are.

Your product has developed a recognition (of a sort) and that's a valuable asset. There's equity in it. You don't throw it out without a good reason. It is vital to your continued success that you retain the goodwill that's been built up, the fact that your readers recognize you. They feel comfortable with the good old mag they're used to. They are loyal.

4. Never think that redesign is going to solve any other problems except those of visual character.

If your product stinks in Times Roman it will continue to stink if you set the type in Palatino.

Five reasons for redesigning

1. When you have a new editorial policy or a new publishing technique or a new technology or a new frequency or whatever—and a redesign is needed to reflect it.

Design isn't just an aesthetic aura surrounding the product, it is an integral part of the product itself. Design reflects the substance. So if you make a change in the product, you ought to change the way it looks as well.

2. When your competitors are gaining on you and are forcing you to look at yourself.

Their products are more spectacular, visibly better than yours. So you have to search your soul—are they better only because they appear better, or are they really better? If they really are better, then you must be better yourself. So you have to improve across the board—and a segment of that improvement is, indeed, the look. But it comes as an outgrowth—a development—of the overall editorial self-analysis operation that you have to undertake.

3. When publishing strategy demands that your sales force beat the bushes for new ad revenue—and they need a good story.

Watch out! Redesign in itself is not regarded very highly by the advertising fraternity. They are cynics and interpret it as a sign of weakness (they may well be right!). So don't tout it as the universal panacea, because it is no such thing. It has to be one of a bunch of sales pitches.

4. When the raw materials you are using are old-fashioned.

Fashions in typography do change. Presentation techniques evolve. You have to stay abreast of the trend—to an extent. So you have to pull yourself up every so often. Every eight years or so used to be about right. The world is now changing at an ever more frenetic pace and the time has been telescoped into every five years.

5. Because you know you are a bit tired and need an infusion of fresh energy.

The process of doing the redesign can give you stimulus. Redesign can act as a catalyst. That is a useful insight. You can use the redesign as a strategy to help you figure out:

- What's wrong with you
- Who you are
- What your options are
- Where you go from here

How well these questions are answered depends on whom you are going to be using as a consultant. Don't try to do it yourself. A surgeon can't take out his own appendix. And in-house people know all the reasons why something can't be done. A magazine expert who knows what she is doing can be used to redesign the look—but in order to do the job

right, she has to ask the questions you should be asking yourself. So you get a free ride on her experience to help you position yourself. That's why you should not hire a cheap, newly graduated youngster, no matter how talented. You need to invest in an expensive, experienced veteran who knows the business. Because it is a tricky business—not an art form.

The three kinds of designers

1. The ones who are using your magazine as an opportunity to improve their portfolio.

To them, design is an end in itself. They tend to be the glamorous flash-in-the-pan achievers. They'll give you an exciting logo, and format the cover as a background for the logo. Coverlines "spoil the purity of the concept." You must have cover-lines to sell . . . they don't care about that; all they care about is Art.

2. Big-cheese experts who have a strong, recognizable style of their own.

They're selling a successful formula. You get exactly what they have to offer, and can use their names as a sales tool. But, best of all, you've covered your ass because you went to the most famous and expensive, which must therefore be the best, so management can't get mad at you.

3. Designers who don't have a particular style.

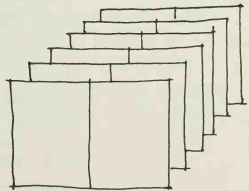
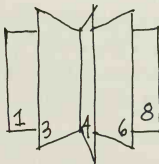
They care less about their own personality than about making the personality of your product appropriate to its market niche. They care about the communication-capacity of your product. Their design scheme grows out of the needs of your publication in all its ramifications. They tailor their suggestions to fit the capabilities of the people involved.

Therefore the visual styling looks different in each of the publications they have serviced. They measure their own success by the way they have affected your success. The successful magazine designers are a peculiar and highly specialized subgroup of design:

- They must perform a functional service—only tangentially an artistic one.
- They must understand what editors and publishers are doing, and therefore not be satisfied with merely displaying it nicely.
- They must create active means of communication to get information off the page into the reader's mind.
- They must not build monuments to themselves, but concentrate on making the product crisp, alive, incisive, special—worthy of a monument as a product.

The magazine as a product

Too many designers (and editors) think of a magazine as a discontinuous gallery of separate, self-contained pictures. Each impression as the pages are turned is an opportunity for a beautiful spread to hang on the wall and admire and get an award for. That is destructive of the product because it disintegrates it. Good magazine designers have a different approach. They see their product in its totality—in 3-D. Instead of a gallery, they conceive of the magazine as a movie filmstrip. It is indeed a



collection of items, but each item is seen and handled as it relates to all the others. The chain is more important than any link. That is the secret.

Six tests to decide whether the designer is right for you

1. Talk about 3-D.

If he or she looks blank, you've got your answer.

2. See the samples.

If the portfolio is full of spreads, you know they are not product-oriented, but flat-picture-on-the-wall oriented.

3. Listen to them speak.

If they communicate well in words, they're likely to be sympathetic to communication (rather than to pure design).

4. Are they enthusiastic?

If they show genuine interest in what your magazine is trying to accomplish editorially, they are likely to find the appropriate visual character. They must be enthusiastic about the subject.

5. Take another look at their samples.

If they submit complete issues of mags, and accompany them with explanations of the needs and how their design helped to fulfill them, you've got the right person.

6. Get the designer to evaluate or critique your magazine as a separately funded professional assignment.

A designer's philosophy demonstrates the direction in which he or she would move your product. These are vital clues about the designer's views and whether they mesh with yours.

That designer is going to be your professional helper—your agent. So there must be intellectual

chemistry. If you hate what the designer says, you've defined what you don't want, so you are that much further ahead. An evaluation costs from \$250 to \$2500. It is usually also a proposal. By studying your product the designer can make a realistic estimate of what needs to be done, how much effort it is likely to take, and therefore how much to charge.

So the definition of scope of services, time schedule, and price estimates should be the last paragraph of the evaluation. Redesign costs a lot because there's a lot to it: it is a developmental process that takes effort, insight, experiments, and time.

Only formula-oriented designers can give birth to the perfect solution like Zeus producing Athena from their foreheads. It is teamwork, in which the editors must take a part. How much should it cost? Anywhere from \$5,000 to \$25,000. Under \$5,000 you'll not get much more than a cosmetic job. Over \$25,000 and you're probably getting robbed.

How to set about it?

Your magazine's success depends on how well information imprinted inside it comes across . . . investors are happy and satisfied if they feel well served. They need good, worthwhile information that is easily accessible. ("This looks nice and it also looks interesting, I'll read it . . . Hey, I'm better off for having read this . . .") That's effective layout, done story-by-story. But the magazine is also an object unto itself . . . and that needs to be used as a tool. The designer must provide a styling for it—as a total product—that will make it recognizable, visible, special. The layout schemes that are used for the story-by-story presentation and are fitted to the styling discipline must make sense not only within themselves but also in relation to one another and the overall product. The styling had

better not be just a fashionable surface wash because that'll date fast.

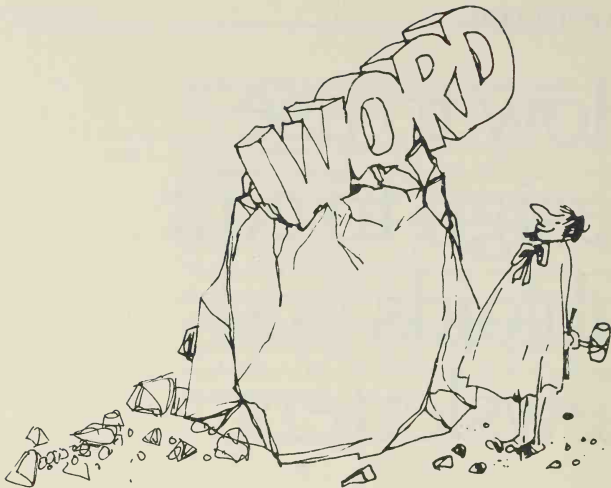
Readers sense shallowness. And media buyers (at whom the redesign is often directed) are canny and sophisticated. They don't think that because a magazine weighs a lot it must be valuable, or because there are a lot of pics in it, it must be lively. The market is more complicated, segmented, and they are more with-it. We cannot get away with rubbish, we must be market-oriented and see our publication as a product out there competing in the marketplace. We must make the most of it despite its limitations.

How to use design to edit tabloids and newsletters

TO many people, design is no more than cake-decorating. It means to make pretty . . . to make pleasing to the eye. That's eyewash! It's the opposite of what it ought to be: design—functional design—is a tool to make clear whatever is being covered.

Too often design is thought of as a cosmetic that is needed after the "real" work has been done: the piece written, edited, finished—only then it is handed over to the art department for treatment. (Those art people aren't really editors. They are artists, for heaven's sake . . . to them out there on Cloud 9, graphic presentation means cutting our valuable copy in order to make their damn pictures bigger. Or using a weird typeface for the headline.)

Unfortunately most reporters, writers and editors—the word people—labor under this misapprehension. Tradition, bad guidance, and mis-education have propelled them into that boxed view that splits the team of communicators into two hostile camps: the



word people and the visual people. Neither likes or even quite trusts the other, and they work at cross-purposes—in the happy event that they don't actually undercut each other. In any case, all of them do a lot of under-the-bench muttering about each other.

How to use design for editing?

Start welding the two factions into one team, whose individual members understand how vital their shared efforts are to the success of the product's acceptance by the public.

Clearly, design is only one of the tools of the information trade. Good presentation is analogous to good writing.

Sure, a lousily written piece may hide its information in clumsy wording, just as a crummy-looking newspaper may conceal those nuggets in confusing visual arrangements. The stuff may be there, but will the readers want to dig it out? Probably not.

That's where we have to understand our audience, whichever demographic group or social class or educational level our product may be catering to. They share one thing: their reluctance to get involved and read.

Why? Because the disastrous reality of this much-vaunted information age is overkill. All of us are buried under an avalanche of so-called information rolling down at us from all sides all day: movies, TV, VCRs, books, newspapers, magazines, corporate literature, junk mail, technical documentation. All vie for our attention and they are test-marketed and beta-tested and scientifically fashioned to creep up on us from behind and penetrate our subconscious from below (and make us buy).

What do all these information-packets demand from us first? Our attention: our concentration, study and, worst of all, our time—the most precious, finite thing we have. No wonder we all build protective fences around ourselves. We are afraid of getting involved, UNLESS there's obviously something there that affects us in some way. (And that word "obviously" is the design-oriented word! We'll come back to that.)

What's-in-it-for-me is the first crucial factor. As potential readers, we may be predisposed toward a point of view and therefore feel good when we find out that the President agrees with us . . . or we are scared of cancer and are happy to find out that a cure has been found . . . or a new magic diet will help us lose 10 pounds overnight. So, the first technique to penetrate the reader's protective fence is to edit and design to reveal to the readers the what's-in-it-for-me factor.

You can even do it with hard news which is supposed to be straight. It may be tricky to angle or interpret the hard news, but you certainly can and must do it with everything else, just as magazines

do. If they didn't, they'd fail. If we don't, we'll fail, because in our features we are producing magazine-type material in a slightly bigger format. (TV is swiping the news-disseminating function newspapers used to have. Newspapers are swiping the feature-report function general-interest magazines used to have. Magazines are serving narrow special-interest markets . . . and much of their news function and analysis function is passing to newsletters.)

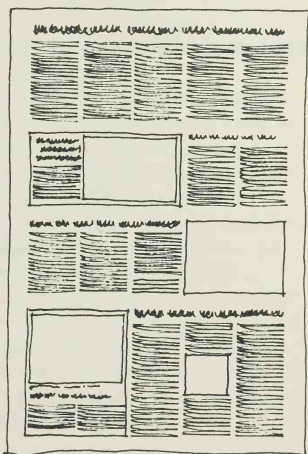
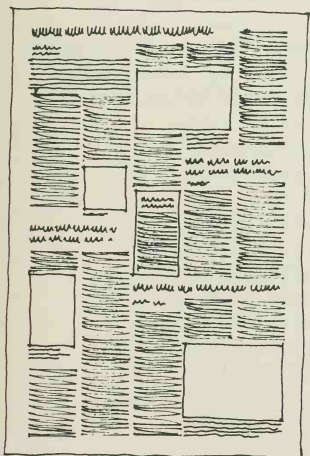
On a more obvious level, the what's-in-it-for-me aspect is, of course, taken care of with shop-window presentation: running teaser boxes about what's inside a section on the front page. But the service-to-the-recipient attitude (perceived by the recipient as what's-in-it-for-me) should form the handling of everything we do. We must couple the exposing of the what's-in-it-for-me factor to the **second crucial factor**: speed.

Speed is the second crucial factor. Few in our culture allow themselves the luxury of time. The normal attention span has been reduced to those 11 minutes between commercials on TV. We have been trained to live by sound bites. So we must couple the what's-in-it-for-me factor with speed, so readers will get it fast. They'll be happier with it that way than if you make them dig it out for themselves from a mass of background.

Stories must be edited down to be shorter, more concise chunks, the shortest of which will get the highest readership score.

Obviousness is the third crucial factor. A news item must be easy to enter and it must be easily understood. Information turned into visual form can be grasped faster than verbal descriptions of statistics. That's why infographics are flowering everywhere—in print from *Time* magazine to *USA Today*, to visual presentations in computer-generated charts and graphs for overheads. And now in video training.

- This is where better cropping of pictures comes in—homing in on the thrust of the story that the image is being used to transmit.
- This is where color comes in: not as superficial decoration but as a tool to organize, highlight, emphasize. Functional color.
- This is where headline typography comes in: the size, boldness, and positioning of heads helps in interpreting the relative importance of each story on the page.
- This is also where modular page arrangement comes in, where stories in vertical or horizontal shapes, with big or little pictures, are displayed on the page for immediate recognition of what belongs with what, and how long each item is. (Incidentally, pages are much easier to assemble using electronic technology. But who of our buyers cares about how the paper was produced? It isn't the how but the what that matters: because we have had to make a mix that sings to

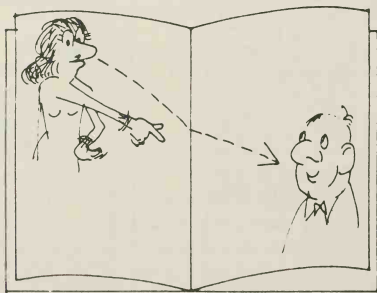


our audience. I'm underwhelmed by the hype of technology, unless it produces a product as good as, if not better than I, as a reader, expect.)

Now let's recognize a fact about our audience that our verbal friends hate to admit. They always glibly talk about "our readers." Readers aren't really readers. At least they don't start out as such. First they are lookers. People scan, hop and skip around, pecking here and there, searching for goodies until something catches their attention. Seldom do they start reading at the start of an article. They enter where they damn-well feel like entering: watch how you read yourself. You are typical . . . That's why we must build in as many welcoming doorways as we can. Because, once fascinated, lookers will indeed start to read.

Salesmanship is the fourth factor. It is also the function of design to catch and then seduce viewers into becoming readers. That's visual salesmanship and, like it or not, in our competition for the potential reader's attention, we must use it or we'll die.

Emotional involvement—the fifth inescapable factor. It's a branch of salesmanship, and of reporting. And of visual presentation. But our uninvolved lookers are humans,



with curiosities, angers, sympathies—the whole range of human emotions—and we must use them. Play on them. And we know that they react faster and more actively to visual stimuli than to intellectual ones. That means photos: they are fast and easy to take in, and can be emotionally involving if they are good. Hence, more space for pics, more budget for photographers. It sells papers.

Guidance for the reader is the sixth factor. Directing the searcher's eye to the important stuff. What is important? Defining that is a function of editing. Achieving the goal of displaying the material to the casual viewer is a function of typography, and layout and design. The two work hand in glove to make it easy for viewers to orient themselves and find what they're looking for.

- Premeditated organization is the key.
- And standardized signs are needed to announce the elements.
- Repetitive elements ought always to be in the same place. Does that mean formatting? Yes—but only those things that make sense to format.

We work on two levels: the product level, where signs demand uniformity to orient the user, and on the journalistic level, where individual stories demand variety and freedom. Balancing the two is quite an act. Freedom is vital for nonrepetitive elements. You have to be choosy—and responsible—about what to emphasize. Typography is the vital representation of tone of voice. If everything screams, all you hear is loud, conflicting noise and nobody listens. Okay, turn the metaphor into visual terms. Messy disorganized typography and page arrangement is like crackling static on the radio. Or call it visual pollution. Call it anything, so long as you don't do it.

Personality—the seventh factor: In this ruthlessly competitive world, it is vital that each product create its own character. Both in terms of its substantive matter—what it thinks and how it says it, what its service is—and in terms of its appearance. That appearance is vital to success. It creates recognition, comfort, habit, user loyalty. Knowing who you are is no less useful to the advertisers. It is the visual context in which your information is carried. It manifests itself by adherence to style that must be protected by strict discipline.

It is especially tricky for us as designers to know when and where to depart from style, because we want to have fun and show off how clever we are. But every departure dilutes the precious recognition. So you only depart from it when there is overwhelming reason to do so. Every departure costs. Always consider the cost/benefit ratio.

Money—the eighth factor. As a marketing tool, better design is succeeding in getting accepted by the financial people who ultimately control everything we do. Design isn't seen as a waste of money anymore. They know that a better-looking vehicle gets better attention from its readership, and thus pulls more ads. Good design has proved to be good for business. Hence; more redesigns, more color, more infographics, perhaps even more freedom for designers. No, not more freedom. We don't need that. We need more clout.

So, in this time of positive change, what must we do to get more clout? We must sell the efficacy of design. Never ever sell a design on the basis of aesthetics—that you “like” it. That is an advantage to us, but not to our partners who are afraid of such fine judgments. That implies taste. And it is safer to say no than to say yes to anything unfamiliar or new. By hanging the decision on “liking,” you give them the weapon NOT to like it—and there's no argument

about that. You abdicate the decision. You have no recourse.

No, we must be seen as responsible journalists who develop design as an integral element of editing.

Design? You must be kidding!
That's ART — ain't got nothing
to do with ME ...
I'm a JOURNALIST!



That means we must develop our ability to explain, justify, and rationalize what we want to do in words and concepts that they feel comfortable with. We must make them see that our goals are no different from theirs, our standards the same as theirs. We must learn to speak their language, because they are verbal people.

Only that way will we become accepted as intellectual equals and contributors to the common good. Because we visual people must join our verbal co-workers to hone our product to make it totally acceptable to our investors—the buyers.

They spend money for which they expect a certain service. We had better deliver on our promise and they had better perceive that they are getting their money's worth. Design guides them to notice these

vital qualities of clarity, value, and speed. Those are the criteria on which good newspaper design should be judged. It hasn't much to do with pure aesthetics. They are a given—they are the foundation on which we build. It's like correct spelling and good grammar for the writers.

No, design has everything to do with journalism and functional expression of substance. That's on the high level. On a lower level, it is really industrial design: styling a product that is right for its audience in its market niche.

Quite a job.

How to use pictures artfully

PICTURES are like fast shots to the brain. They are more effective than the proverbial 1,000 words because they can bypass conscious thought and attack the emotions. They are what people look at first, before they start reading. Pictures catch attention and arouse curiosity as people flip pages, wondering whether there's anything in there for them.

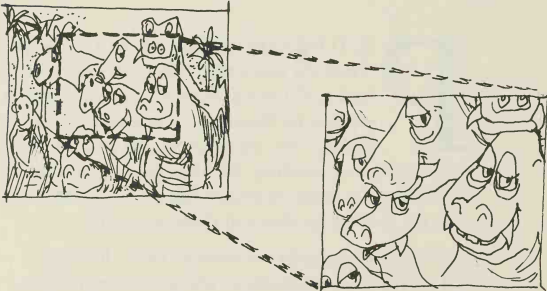
Looking at pictures is not seen as work. It is fast and personal. If the pictures are good, they involve the viewers' emotions. That is why pictures pull people into the publication. Once the viewers' attention is caught by fascinating images, they will be hungry for more information. That is how pictures turn lookers into readers.

To use pictures well, tell the most alluring part of the story through them. Used this way, pictures become a communication tool as rich as words. All publications share the vital need to bring out for the reader the "what's-in-it-for-me" quality—the significance or usefulness of the information to that one individual reader to whom you are speaking. Use the picture to help expose it.

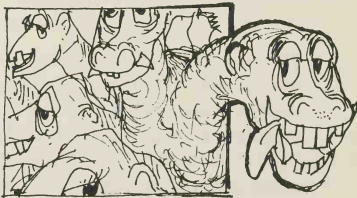
Here are 22 tips to help you use pictures better:

1. To use pictures as tools for communication, pick them for their capacity to carry meaning, not just for their prettiness as photographs. Don't be bamboozled by photography as an art form. The text doesn't pretend to be poetry; the pictures don't need to be art.

2. If you want impact from your images, don't be afraid to tamper with the originals. They are not sacred. They are there for your purposes as a communicator. You can edit them just the way you edit words. Bring out the meaning by making the

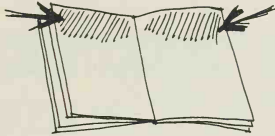


significant part of the image dominant. Crop away unnecessary background.

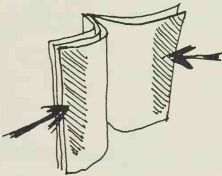


3. If you want something in the picture to stand out, expose it, isolate it, or bring it out from its background in some way.

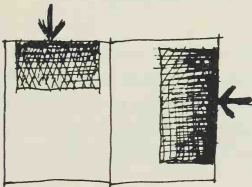
4. Never size a picture just to fit the available space. Consider whether its importance makes it worthy of being large and make it large only if you deliberately want to play something up.



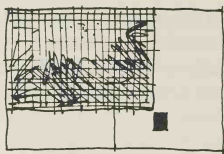
5. Put whatever you want to be noticed near the top of the page. That's where the skimmers look as they scan the publication.



6. To make sure they are noticed, put the most important elements on the outsides of the pages. That's the part that is exposed when the page-flipper flips.

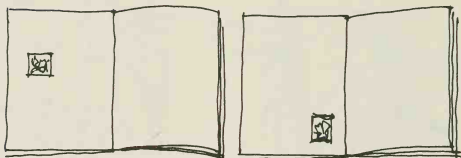


7. If you want to get maximum impact from a picture, "bleed" it, if your equipment allows it. Bleeding extends the image beyond the confines of the page into the space beyond the margins. But avoid insignificant bleeds across narrow margins. They are hardly noticeable.



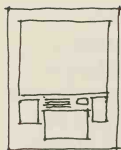
8. To gain maximum impact from a picture in restricted space, make it look bigger by contrasting it against a tiny one.

9. If a photo depicts a complicated subject, make its size appropriate to what you want to be seen. If you want to show details, make them big enough to be seen.

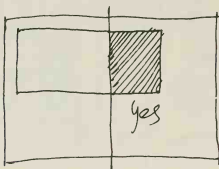
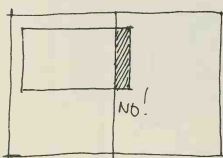


10. If you don't need to make something appear important, make it small. If it is small, we think of it as unimportant, as a footnote. If you need to play something down, make it small then bury it at the bottom of the page near the gutter.

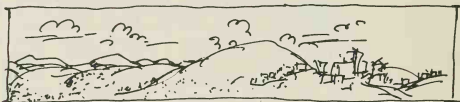
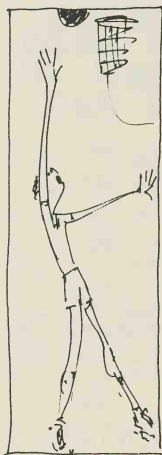
11. The more columns there are on the page, the greater the flexibility in picture handling. Two-column pages restrict pictures to two widths: full-page wide or one-column wide. Three columns yield three widths; four columns yield four.



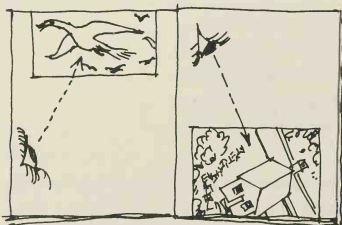
12. Choose the most significant picture and make it dominant in both size and placement if you want the point of a group of pictures to be clearly understood. The others in the group are subordinated and used to support that main thrust.



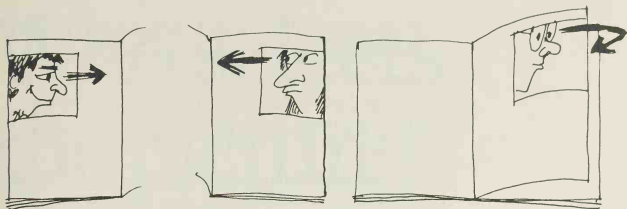
14. Jump the gutter with pictures, but do it big, don't do it small. In fact, avoid doing anything in a half-hearted way. If a technique is worth using, it is worth getting credit for. That means it has to be made visible to the viewer. Few readers are as aware of what you are doing as you are. See it the way they will. Hit them over the head to make them notice.



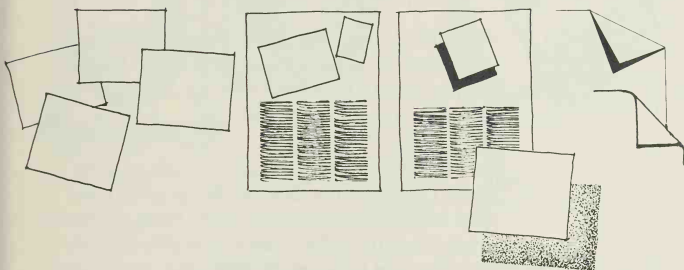
15. Use the rectangle to best advantage. Tall, vertical subjects demand a tall skinny rectangle, whereas broad, flat landscapes look most natural in a horizontal shape. You are not necessarily stuck with the shape the original picture has. Change it by cropping, to make the most of every opportunity.



16. Place pictures that are taken looking upwards on the top of the page. Where do aerial photos go? Right: looking down on the foot of the page.



17. The direction in which people in pictures are gazing is a clue to where they should be placed on the page. Our human curiosity to see what someone else is looking at in real life carries over into photos. Put people facing into the page, not off it, unless you want to pull the viewer onto the next page.

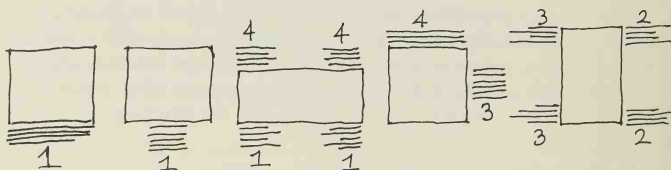


18. Another way to think of images, especially photographs, is as objects in themselves: pictures floating on the surface of the page. The easiest way to create this illusion is to give them an outline like a photographic print, or have them cast a shadow. And, of course, place them on the page at a slight angle, which separates them visually from the type and other stuff.

19. If you have uninteresting pictures, consider cropping them into unexpected shapes. The unusual shapes startle the viewers and gain their attention. But if you have good pictures, leave them alone.

20. If you want the word-and-picture team to work for you with a one-two punch, try looking at the pictures and text as if you were a first-time looker. Look at and read them together . . . then fix the words so their meaning flows out of the image.

21. For fast communication, explain the significance of each image in its own caption. Place the caption where the viewer looks for it first: under the picture.



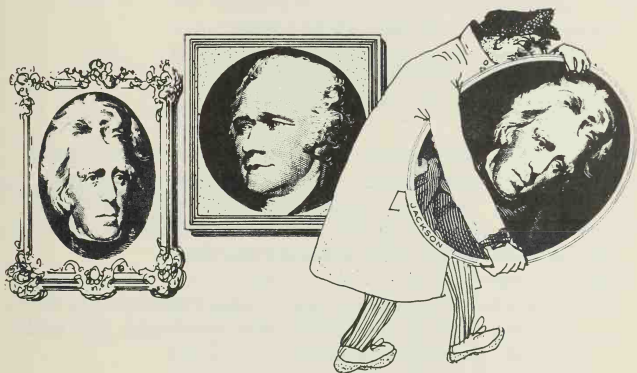
The numbers represent preferences in placement

Of course, you can put it elsewhere, and you can even bunch captions somewhere else on the page. But you are paying a price: is it worth asking the reader to do that extra work?

22. There is not much you can do with product shots. They are what they are. But you can often work with the backgrounds. Make them all similar in tone, texture, color. That is not difficult to do with the right program. Or silhouette the subjects so they appear as objects lying on the page.

There are no rules about using images. There is only your own judgment of what makes sense for the particular material in your particular publication directed at your particular audience. So think of that responsibility and fulfill it, rather than worrying about design.

Who selects the pictures?



IF the editorial people aren't just as involved as the art people in the selection of photographs for an article, the magazine will suffer. Why bother with design? Well, of course you want your magazine to look as nice as possible. That's basic—it's a given. Are there really people who don't want their magazine to put the publishing company in its best light and make the reader:

- Pay attention
- React positively
- Feel good
- Maybe even take some action?

But wait. Isn't that a definition of the function of advertising? Haven't we just made design synonymous with salesmanship? Because, after all, it's what you do beyond mere nice appearance and intelligibility that matters. How about thinking of design as an element of publishing strategy? That design should exemplify the image the publishers want the public to perceive. The criteria then are no longer necessarily aesthetic, but tactical. The right look will vary with:

- The intent of the medium
- The character of its audience
- The substance of the message.

Still, perhaps even more important than design as salesmanship or design as publishing strategy is design as editing. Design then becomes a part of journalism. And that demands a different set of relationships and understandings.

- In design as salesmanship, design is not an end in itself. It is the means to an end other than itself: selling the goods.
- In design as corporate strategy, design is a mechanism. It is the means to an end wider than itself: the right image.
- In its journalistic or editorial aspect, however, design is a complex set of techniques. It is the means of getting ideas off the pages and into the reader's mind—quickly, clearly, memorably.

Cooperation between equals

In the editorial area, effective presentation is the result of teamwork—intimate intellectual cooperation between writer and designer. However, the relationship between writer and designer is not

always friendly. On the contrary, the schism between the two can be destructive. But if each respects the other and understands the other's contributions to the magazine, intellectual battles will mean better communication—and a better product. Besides, the more mental sparring, the more fun.

Nobody has a monopoly on wisdom. The editorial people cannot dictate to the designers, nor should the designers be placed in a position of such unquestioned omniscience that they can dictate how a piece should look. It is not a question of status, turf, importance, or pecking order. It is a question of producing the best possible printed piece.

Pictures are the touchstone

Pictures can be a difficult problem in this process of producing the best possible product because they fall between the two jurisdictions: they are artistic in the way they look, and editorial in the way they are interpreted for meaning. Both aspects are equally important to the end result. Hence the potential for misunderstandings. Usually, pictures are judged by their looks. The designers "like them"—and often persuade reluctant or instinctively resistant editors to give in to their views. They are able to do this because:

- Editors hesitate to give opinions on visual matters because they feel they lack official sanction: They haven't had any training in "art."
- Editors feel they have enough on their plates to worry about, and visual matters are best left to the experts. (That's what they get paid for.)
- Editors often leave the visual problem till the end, after the "important" part of their work is done. Therefore . . .

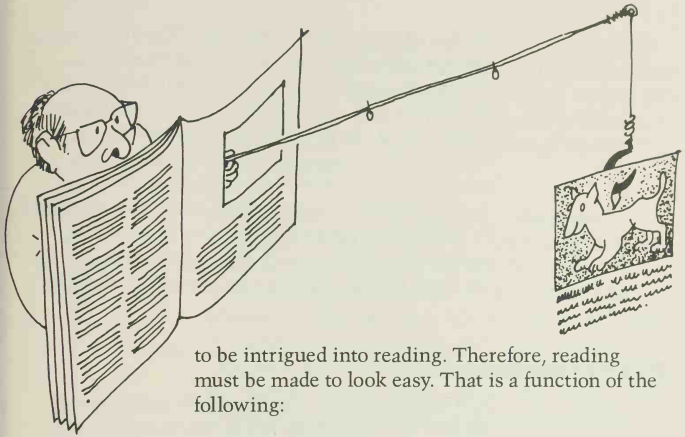
- Designers get the material last, and so late in the sequence of production that there is little time left for discussion, change, or improvement. They must make the best of what they have within the deadline. Designers therefore have final control by default. The attitude is, "What the hell, we have to go with it as it is, it's the best we've got." That's not quite as bad as the editors' rationalization: "Anyway it doesn't really matter. It's just art—window dressing to bamboozle the reader with. Right?"

This is an attitude that lends itself to a momentary digression. Consider: the picture morgue is kept in files that are, physically, a dependency of the art department. That very location lowers them (in the editor's eyes) to the secondary status pictures have always suffered from—as superfluous, decorative, grayness-relieving elements. But where do writers keep their sources of factual information, their reference material, reports from the field, statistics and so on? As close by as possible, usually in filing cabinets, for easy access. (A morgue is a morgue is a morgue.) That material is their stock in trade—but so are pictures, if the editors would only realize it!

Pictures are gold mines of information

Pictures are goldmines of factual information. Furthermore, they elicit emotional responses—and that helps communicate ideas. But because pictures are relegated to secondary, background status and kept in files "down there" someplace, they aren't thought of as the other language we communicate with in print. They are thought of as something to add later, like icing on the cake.

And that's insane, because pictures entice and invite readers into the magazine. That's an important function because, in my opinion, nobody really wants to read. It's too much work. Most people need



to be intrigued into reading. Therefore, reading must be made to look easy. That is a function of the following:

- Typography
- Layout
- Page architecture
- Format

And the subject must be made to look fascinating. That is a function of the following:

- Visual/pictorial allure
- Graphic cleverness
- Interpretation

Attracting the reader

Looking at pictures isn't work, it's fun. That's why the pictures are looked at first every time a new page is revealed to the casual page-flipper. If the images are beguiling, and if they are explained in accompanying captions/text in such a way that the viewer is intrigued by them, the pictures have done their job.

What makes a picture irresistible? The viewer's self-interest: Somehow, the viewer must be made to notice a picture's relevance to himself/herself. It is the editor's function to recognize that quality and expose it—or the potential attention-getting quality of the picture is wasted. We, as communicators, must get the uninvolved reader to care. Giving a damn is an emotional response. It can be engendered by intellectual persuasion—that is, by providing provocative words to read; and by presenting affecting images that elicit an instinctive reaction.

Pictures are irresistible

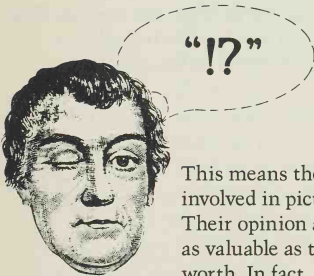
Putting it bluntly, if visual symbols are exploited not just as passive keys, but as functional hooks—actively, with forethought—your readership will go up in geometric progression. How do you do that? By making changes in the approach to writing/editing.

- Become aware of the capacity of pictures to communicate ideas. They can do more than show what something or somebody looks like.
- Choose pictures for their inherent significance to the story, rather than for their photographic excellence.
- Predicate the verbal report on the assumption that pictures will be used in tandem with the words.
- Write the story with the pictures in mind: Do the layout first and write to fit, rather than retrofit.
- Substitute pictures for text as visual shorthand wherever the subject makes it feasible.
- Point out what you want the reader to notice in the picture in the accompanying caption.

- Write captions before the text of the story. This will force you to edit out ideas from the text that you plan to report through the visual images. (It's too difficult to do it afterwards, and besides, you resist spoiling a well-crafted piece of text once it's finished.)

All that may sound simple, but it represents a revolution in the thinking of most journalists who have not been trained to respect the capacity of visual communication. It is a climb to the next plateau of effective communication in today's terms. It is a much more sophisticated level than the simplistic newspaper reporting still taught in most journalism schools, where the all-important visual component of the verbal/visual product is still roundly ignored.

Picture selection cannot be left to the instincts of the art people. Yes, it is an aesthetic decision, but only in part. It is also an integral element of the editing process. Pictures communicate just as do words—and they are worthy of as much consideration and thought as words.



This means the editors must be as intimately involved in picture selection as are the designers. Their opinion as to a picture's relevance to a story is as valuable as the designer's opinion of its visual worth. In fact, I'd venture to say that the editor's judgment is even more valuable to the success of the magazine than the designer's judgment. And that's why it must be an intrinsic part of the editors' duty

as communicators to explain their reasoning to the designers, so that the designers can understand and do what's needed.

That's why you have battles—intellectual sparring, story conferences, eyeball-to-eyeball confrontations. Not about who dictates what goes, but to hammer



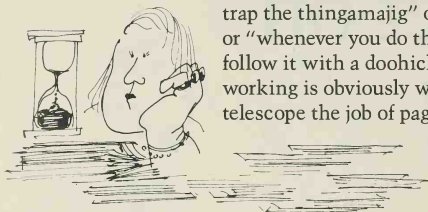
out the best possible expression of the story's content. It is, after all, the product that matters. The best place to foster and develop this friendly cooperation? Over a good lunch on the editor's expense account.

For goodness' sake, get on with it!

WE publication-makers are nothing if not human. That's why we all tend to put off what we don't enjoy, or dread doing, until the last possible moment. That's why layout gets postponed until it becomes inescapable, and at that critical point we then trade thought for expediency. We throw the thing together the best way it happens to fit. That's all we can do under the crazy circumstances we make for ourselves. We don't expect too much of those layouts, given the wonderful excuse of "not enough time."

We just cannot step back to examine what we've been doing before it is committed to the printer for duplication by the thousands—nor do we really want to, because we're a bit afraid of that very examination. We'd just as soon avoid noticing those oh-the-heck-with-it compromises we forced ourselves into making through our own mismanagement of time.

Instead, we fall back on rationalizations, on those conventional wisdoms, those tried-and-true maxims remembered from some distant workshop leader or



consultant. And they—the wisdoms—are probably taken out of context and were probably never understood thoroughly in the first place. Yet we build our product on a foundation of trite generalizations that tell us nonsense like “never trap the thingamajig” or “never jump the whatisis” or “whenever you do the flumadiddle, you must follow it with a doohickey!” No, that way of working is obviously wrong. It is just as silly to telescope the job of page arranging, which is the

final step of the editing process, into minimal time at the end, as newspapers do.

Why should we avoid using those catch-phrase nostrums and precepts for our products? Because they bottle up our potential for originality. They stop us from thinking creatively. How does one think creatively in this area? By taking the editing process two steps beyond the manuscript stage—steps that are as important to the final result as the writing itself and, therefore, an integral part of the editor’s task.

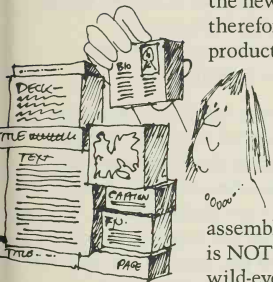
Step 1: Figure out the emphasis.

Step 2: Make the emphasis visible on the page.

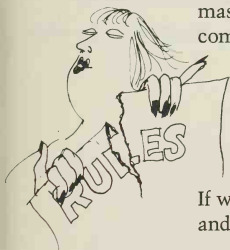
The first step is a mental/verbal process; the second a mental/visual process. Once you know what the significance of the story is (to your reader!), you can decide on which elements to put your emphasis, be they pictorial, verbal, graphic, or a meld of all three. Emphasis—in whatever form it may take—is the very soul of the art of publishing. Just running a story straight may well be good enough for a newspaper, but it is definitely not good enough for a periodical.

Why? Because the essence of a newspaper is in its up-to-dateness. That's why the design process is not so important for a newspaper as it is for a magazine. The emphasis in newspapers is not so much on quality as on fast-closing, concentrating on the hard-news value of the content rather than on image.

But the essence of a periodical is that it interprets the news into information of use to its readers. It is therefore a much more intimate, personalized product. It must therefore be much more carefully



assembled. This is where design comes in. Design is NOT a bunch of secrets only revealed to some wild-eyed practitioners. It's a working tool for the working editor. When design is done for its own sake, then it is indeed a scary monster (depending, as it does, on subjective "liking"—something nobody can argue about). But when you see design as just a means of calling the readers' attention to that which you, as editor, consider the important element, then design is no longer art for art's sake. It becomes a technique for communication's sake. That's when it becomes obvious that anybody with a modicum of editorial insight and decisiveness can master it. There are no rules. Honestly. Just common sense.



If what you feel like doing makes sense for the story, and makes sense in the context within which the

story will be seen, then you ought to do it—whatever the “it” may be. Forget the reasons why not. Follow what is your most important asset: your journalistic instinct.

Think the problem through, then lay it out so the reader cannot help but notice whatever you deem to be the crucial element in the story. Make it big . . . run it in color . . . at an angle . . . upside down . . . in green with pink spots. It doesn’t matter how you do it or what you do, so long as the journalism is right. That’s what will guarantee appropriate excitement and liveliness.

Anyway, once you’ve got your Big Point down, you arrange the supporting material around it. But you cannot do this sort of in-depth thinking when you have 18 pages to lay out between now and 10:00 tonight, when the printer’s last pickup comes around. If that’s all the time you have, no wonder you can only produce bland pap. Instead, start laying out as soon as the galleys for each story arrive.

Inspiration won’t come next week at deadline time. On the contrary, by then you’ll have forgotten the important things worthy of emphasis in the story that is at the forefront of your mind.

If you pin the layout down right now, as an integral step in your thinking, then each story will have a shape that is a development of its inner editorial meaning. That is what is going to make it interesting. Not just superficially, cosmetically pretty.

So, conquer that mistrust of makeup! See it for what it is **and DO get on with it!**



This comprehensive, illustrated, easy-reference guide for the first-time desktop publisher offers the basics, the confidence, and the skills to produce first-rate documents. In quick-reference format, the volume provides the basic skills and essential guidelines that help readers think through a publication from concept to execution.

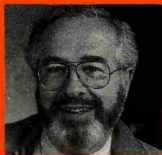
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- the sequencing of thoughts on the page
- the contrasts of size, scale, and colorfulness for visual effect
- the typefaces, which affect the mood and first impressions
- the size, shape, and texture of the paper



PAUL LYNCH

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